ANNOUNCED
DOOM III
DETAILS INSIDE

MORE THAN 100 XBOX GAMES REVIEWED AND RATED

XBN

XBOX NATION INDE AGAZINE

PLUS

DOA Xtreme Beach Volleyball—Exclusive all–new screens and info. p20

Special Investigation

Hacking the Xbox: A year from now your humble Xbox could be the cheapest desktop PC you ever bought… p56

UNREAL GOES LIVE

Exclusive: We've played it all online. An *XBN* special report

HALO 2

First amazing screens: Microsoft unveils the sequel to the game that launched the Xbox

PROJECT EGO

Behind the scenes at Lionhead: Stunning new screens and info on *Project Ego* and *B.C.*

MGS: Substance
Exclusive screens and new, sneakier, info. p84

TimeSplitters 2
First review of this sprawling FPS. p100

Psychonauts
It's weird. It's wacky. It's all here. p76

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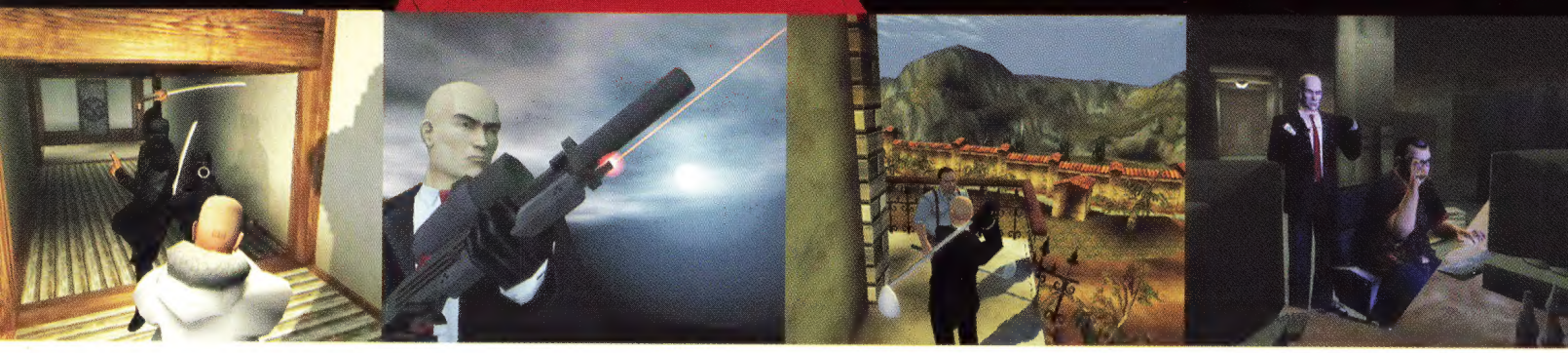

OUT NOW

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Violence

PC CD

PlayStation.2

XBOX

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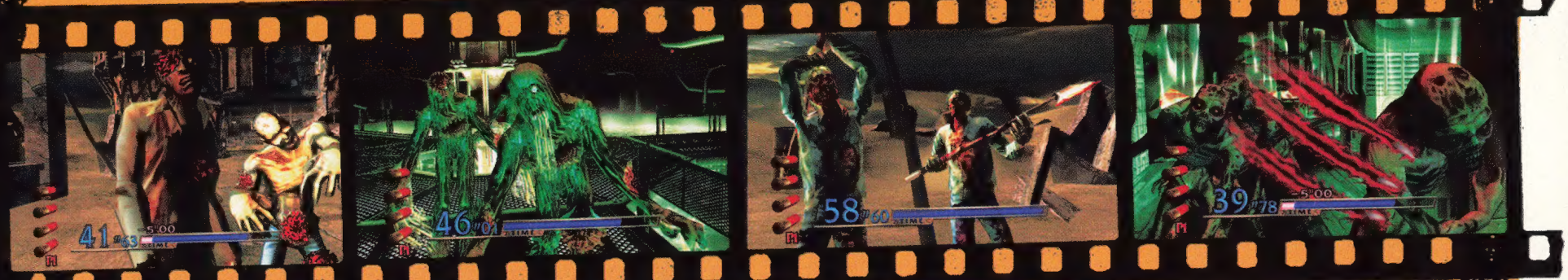

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Blood and Gore Violence

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XBN INDEX

XBOX NATION INDEPENDENT XBOX MAGAZINE

Going Live

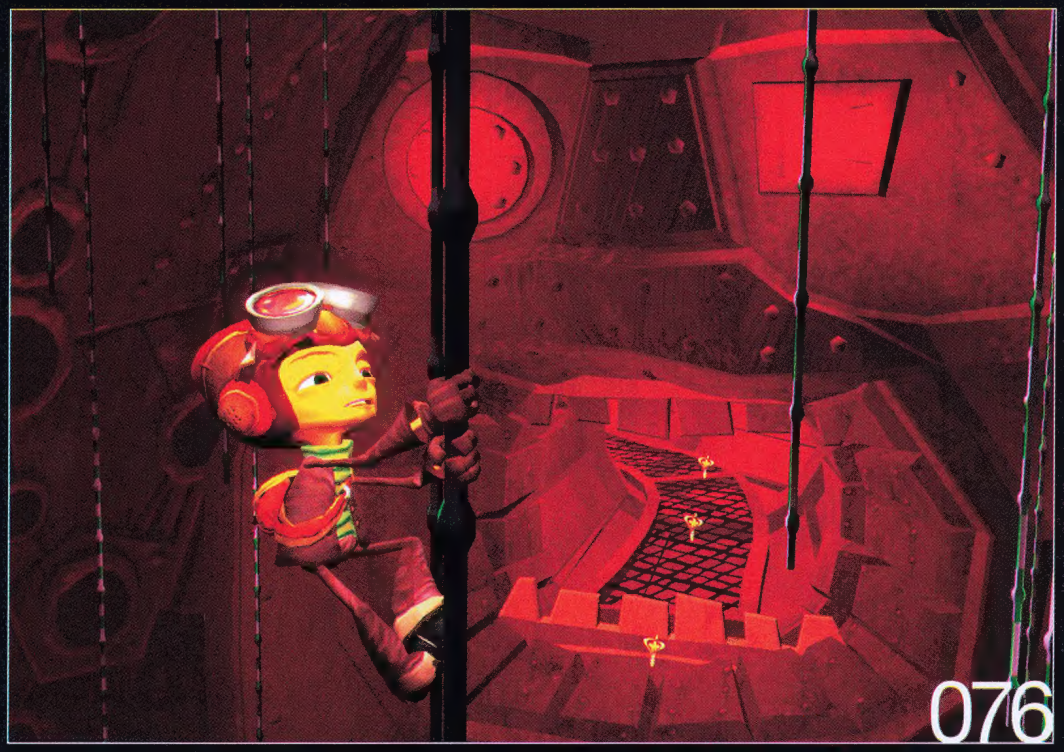
The box was marked "PS2 Online Starter Kit," and it was immediately gangstered by *Xbox Nation*'s art director. What he expected to find in there is anyone's guess, but the look on his face when he opened it was one of those moments even Mastercard can't buy. In the box was a pair of paper cups connected by a piece of string, a small notepad, and lots of shredded pieces of paper...

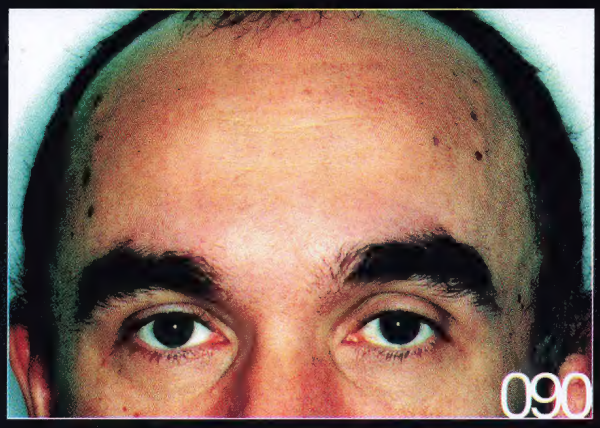
As for the Xbox online plans, it has been almost a year since Xbox launched and *Halo* changed games forever. November 15 will mark that anniversary and usher in a new era: broadband console gaming. Leading the charge will be Digital Extremes' prize pony *Unreal Championship*, which we played online for a day in London, Ontario with the design team. Suffice to say, it's going to be a blast. Our special report begins on page 38.

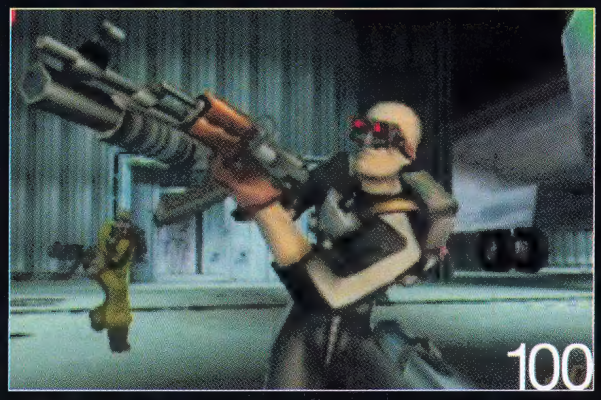
But that's just one of the games that will drive sales this holiday season. Microsoft threw off its monogrammed polo shirt and chinos to embrace trendy SOHO New York with its X02 event. Besides trying to avoid looking like the parent that just walked into a rave, it showcased some excellent first- and third-party titles, including the latest builds of the 3D fighter *Tao Feng*, the impossibly complex *Steel Battalion*, the Louvre-jumping *Midtown Madness 3*, the vacuum-packed *Blinx*, and the shuffle 'n' snipe *Splinter Cell* (which we also feature on page 66).

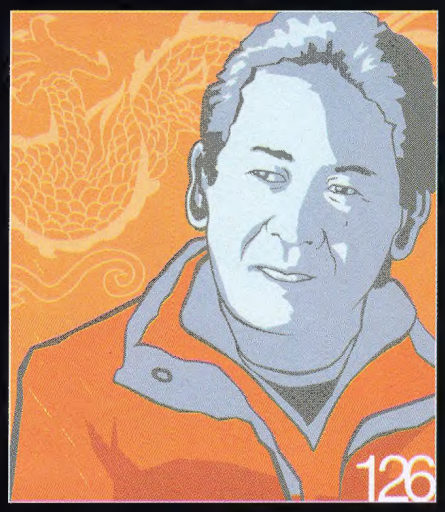
Oh, and, in case you're interested, Microsoft also showed a three-minute video of some game called *Halo 2*.

Simon Cox
Editor-in-chief









XPRESS
Now and Next

016 X02 Event
Can someone say, "*Halo 2*?"

020 DOA: Beach Volleyball
Volleyball the way we like it: Xtreme

022 Doom III
It's coming!

026 NTK News
All the news you need to know

FUTURE
Coming Soon to Xbox

038 Unreal Championship
Go online with this monster FPS

048 Your Guide to Xbox Live
Turn it up, tune it in, log on ...

066 Splinter Cell
Just don't call it *Metal Gear Solid*

072 Blinx: The Time Sweeper
Have vacuum, will sweep time

084 MGS 2: Substance
Now with 30 percent more solidity!

086 Haven
Like Hell, only not so much

XRATED
Smart Reviews

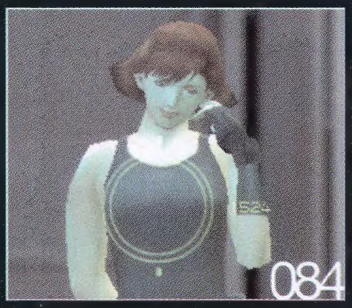
100 TimeSplitters 2
102 Sega GT 2002
104 Dead to Rights
106 NFL 2K3
108 Madden 2003
110 NFL Fever 2003
111 Buffy the Vampire Slayer
112 Morrowind
114 Dynasty Warriors 3
116 Terminator: Dawn of Fate
118 Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller
118 Robotech: Battlecry
119 NCAA 2K3
119 NCAA Football 2003
119 Splashdown
119 Enclave
120 David Beckham Soccer
120 Chase
120 Mike Tyson Boxing
120 Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer
121 Legends of Wrestling
120 Redcard 20-03
120 Marvel vs. Capcom 2
120 NFL Blitz 20-03
120 Totaled!
120 Taz: Wanted
120 Outlaw Golf
120 Tetris Worlds
122 Rewind

XTRA
Out of the Box

126 Yu Suzuki
Speaks out on *Shenmue 2*

130 Spin
XBN CD and DVD selections

132 Inbox
Your mail goes here. So does ours.



FEATURE
Big Hitters

038 Going Live
Your broadband future looks bright

056 Hacking The Xbox
Open your Xbox, see what makes it tick

076 Closer To Double Fine
XBN examines Tim Schafer's newest opus

090 Peter's Friends
Behind the scenes at Lionhead Studios

Team

Simon Cox
MEGACAR!

Knighted by Her Majesty the Queen of England for Gallantry in the War Against British Dentists, Simon recently found his true calling: filing nuisance lawsuits against the Pilsbury Doughboy. When not dreaming of the words, "Pay to the Order of..." Editor-in-chief Cox manages to imbue *Xbox Nation* with all manner of artistic and editorial goodness. He would also like to remind you that if you don't read his Lionhead feature, he will not invite you to the Senior Prom.

David Ziganay
Art For Art's Sake

We suspect the muse that inspires "Dangerous" Dave Ziganay is, in reality, that hideous leprechaun from the movies, the one that's always killing people in strange and unusual ways, hoarding gold, and generally creeping us out with his homicidal prancing. We're not likely to ask, though, because Dave has been known to create his layouts with a bloodstained mouse on a mousepad that seems to be made of human ears.

Evan Shamoon
Man With Gun

Young Evan Shamoon came to America with a shiny nickel in his pocket, and a love for all things Utah. After being booed off the jug band circuit, Shamoon sought refuge amid the carnies where he gained both popularity and fame for his superhuman ability to eat a gas station hot dog without dying. Won't you please adopt him?

Greg Orlando
Lugubrious G

Less with the sass and more with the oomph, *Xbox Nation*'s Vanguard for the People Greg Orlando is many things to all who yearn for the sweet, sweet yam of freedom: poet, cereal magician, friend to the lumpy and misshapen, Herald of the Obvious and, most recently, Sherpa detective. You are, he would remind you, not the boss of him.

Contributors

Carlo Bacor
Photographer

In shutterbug terminology, Carlo Bacor is "good." His photography is *The Simpsons* in a sea of *She's The Sherrifs*—and you can witness Bacor's purdy pictures in this issue's "Closer to Double Fine" feature or you can be forever dammned to mire in your own crapulence. And see if we care!

Dan DiGiacomo
Freelance Writer

Despite being hard at work penning *Foos: The Movie*, a screenplay about a plucky and hairless Scandavian boy who becomes the world's greatest foosball player the world has ever seen, DiGiacomo was kind enough to write five (count 'em) football game reviews and a *Metal Gear* preview for this issue.

Russell Garbutt
Freelance Writer

Teen dream Russell Garbutt (He's so wonderful!) likes hanging out, playing videogames, talking with his friends, and eating pizza. We feel strangely like asking him to the ice cream social next Tuesday.

Jeff Lundrigan
Freelance Writer

Jeff Lundrigan has been writing about video games as long as he can remember, which is hardly impressive given his penchant for Pabst, Methadone, and recreational fungi. In fact, you've been reading this bio for as long as he can remember. Now, what the heck were we talking about again?

Andrew Mendoza
Designer

Indefatigable patron of fierce, knuckle-fed justice and administrator of revenge served cold as a Swede's heart, Drew has the uncanny ability to make magazine pages "go away." His girlfriend Lisa psychoanalyzed the entire *XBN* staff in a record 14 minutes, which is scary since we are all in fact androids, immune to "feelings" and "emotions."

Jeff Pearlman
Freelance Writer

Born without a "soul" or "human decency" plucky ne'er-do-well Jeffrey Pearlman went looking for love in all the wrong places and instead found ennui in all the right ones. Accidentally welded to a three-toed juggler named Yuma Pete, Pearlman still manages to keep on keeping on. And we love him.

Jeremy Sarmiento
Intern

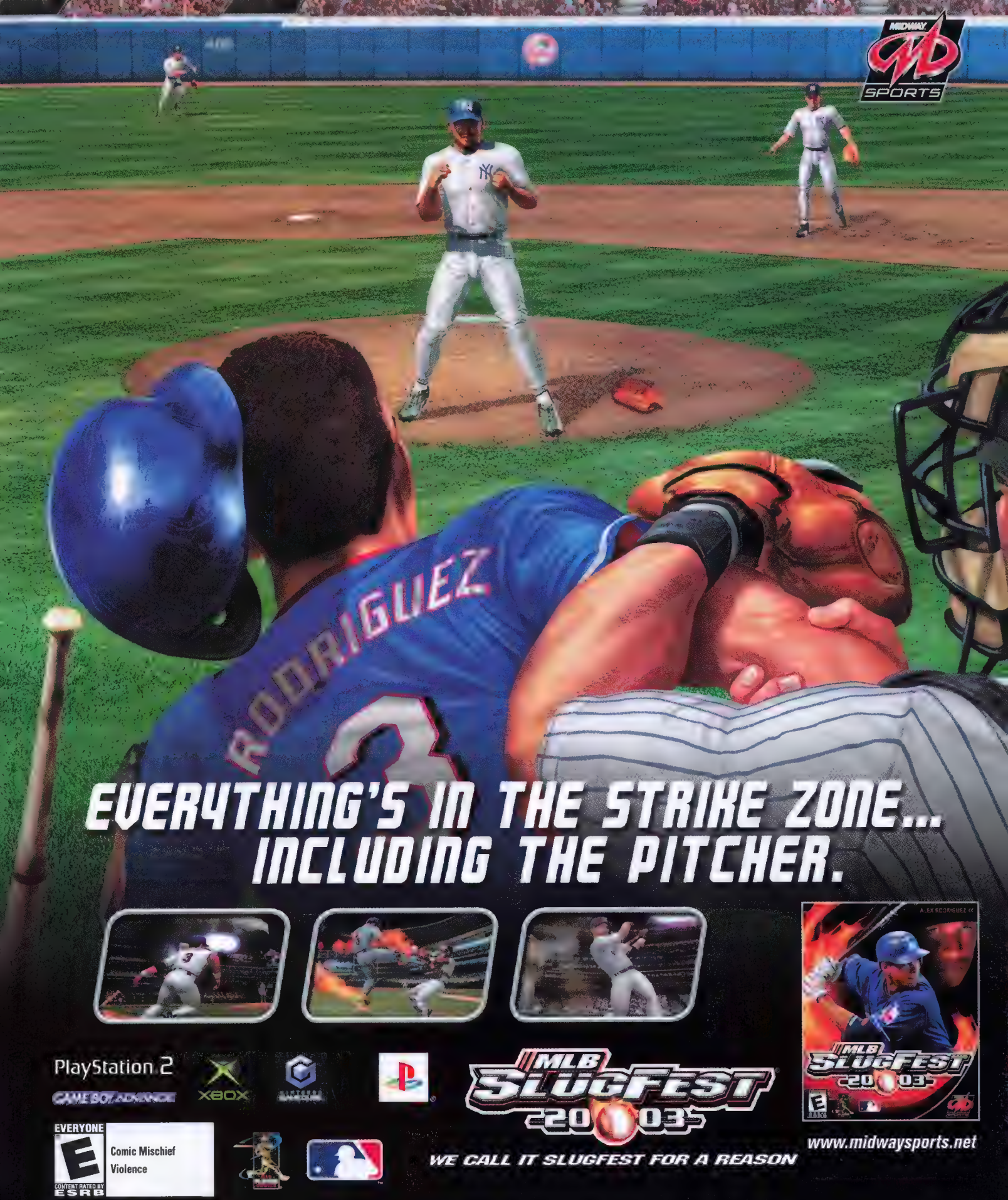
Once every couple of weeks, young Jeremy will roll out of bed around noon and call us up., "Y'all need me to come in today?" he'll yawn. Usually we take pity and tell him to go back to sleep since, after all, he should be enjoying his summer vacation. Other times we tell him to get his ass in here and help us make a magazine, and for that we salute him.

Matt Sammons
Freelance Writer

Buffoon turned drunkard Matt "Matthew" Sammons always uses his writing ability for good and not for ill. Though basic humanity and hygiene have seemingly escaped him, Sammons is a double-plus-good reviewer, and the sharpest tack on the teacher's seat, if you understand our meaning.

Paul Yoon
Freelance Writer

Meat and meat by-products, beware! Paul Yoon has a cleaver and he's not afraid to use it. A cut above (note the delicious butcher's pun) the average freelancer, Yoon is the mastermind behind *Xbox Nation*'s hacking feature.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peter line | tina basich | andrew crawford | burton christy | daniel franck | kevin jones | jussi oksanen | todd richards | nicole thom

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XBOX
NINTENDO
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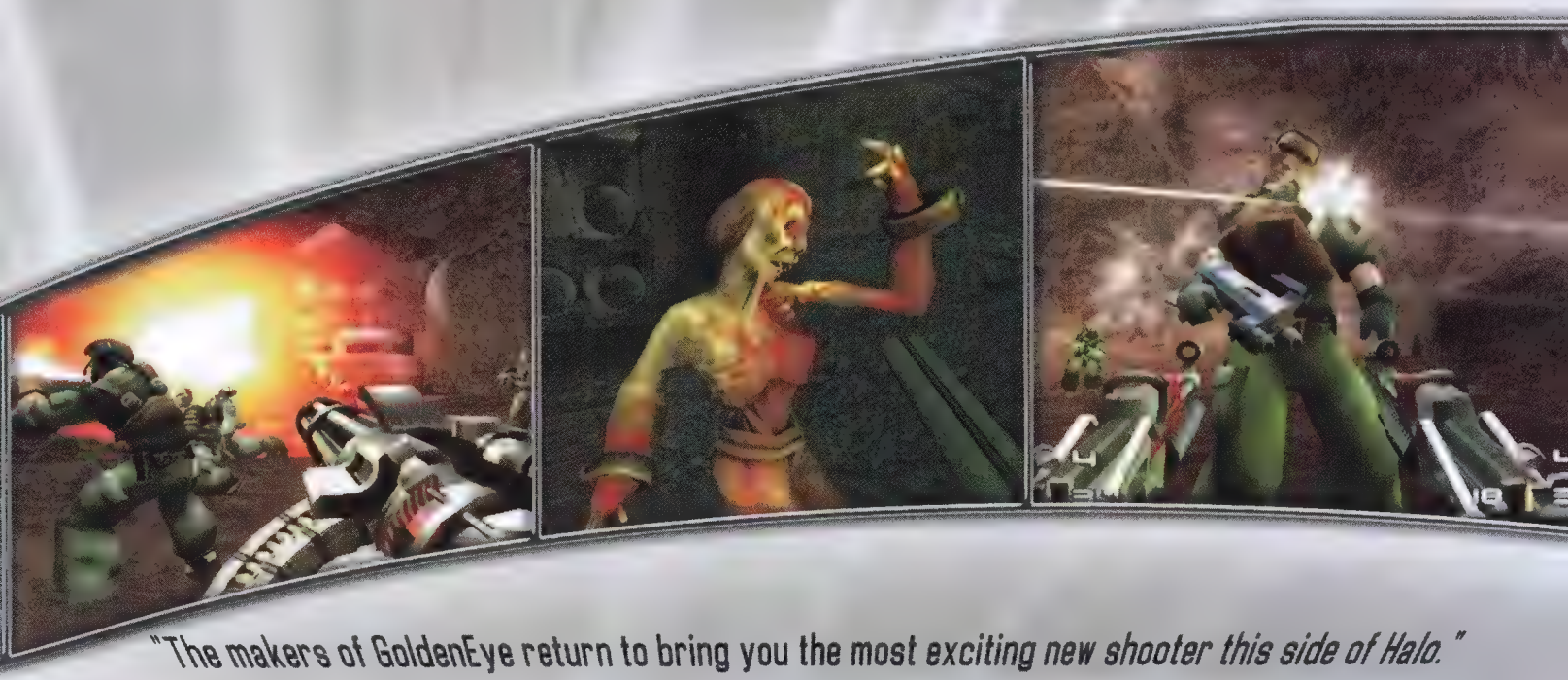
PlayStation 2



"The makers of GoldenEye return to bring you the most exciting new shooter this side of Halo."
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XBOX Nation

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Nintendo Power

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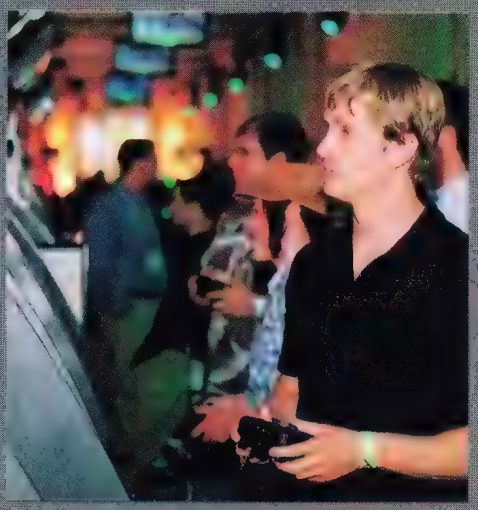

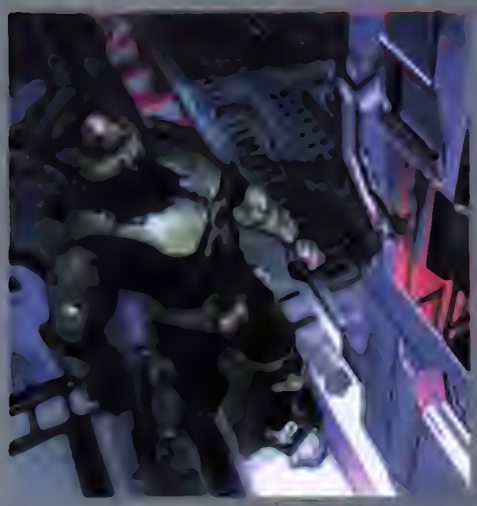

X02

Armed with a plasma rifle and a new graphics engine, Microsoft stakes its claim for the future

The Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) lived it up, but it was Microsoft's X02 mini-expo that gave Xbox boosters the final push they needed to get properly excited about the coming holiday season. Held in the lounge-like confines of a New York art gallery, Xbox Nation, along with international press, was treated to further looks at stuff we'd already seen, and a couple of things we hadn't, including Halo 2 (which, incidentally, no one thought they would see until at least November).

Following an impassioned introduction by Microsoft's Vice-President of Xbox Games Content (and de facto boss of all first-party titles) Ed Fries, the wraps finally came off what is perhaps the most eagerly awaited sequel of all time. And it hushed the room.

The three-minute video showed the Master Chief responding in his own inimitable style to an attack on Earth. As explosions crater the surface below, he jumps out of a ship and lies towards the planet, hoping to land on an enemy dreadnought before, presumably, he will use an enormous can opener to make his way inside. Bungie has a knack for firing the imagination with its teaser trailers, and this was no exception. The explosions on the Earth's surface brought to mind raging battles fought over Xbox Live connections, with squads of players joining in. But nothing was confirmed nor denied.

Halo 2 will be an online title—though not exclusively, as it will sport a thorough single-player experience. Of course, there were more questions, than answers. Will Xbox Live play be incorporated into the missions and story? Will you be able to play as Covenant forces? Will Cortana have gained weight since the last mission? We'll have to wait much longer for a response to those questions (Halo 2 isn't likely to emerge from development until fall 2003), but one question that was immediately answered—and with style, was how much better the game is going to look over the original.

Nicknamed the "Bloom effect" by Microsoft, the lighting engine has transformed the look of the first. Bright sunlight gives form surfaces, and true, [illegible] reflections appear in the Master Chief's visor. Everything is high contrast: the shadows are pitch black, and the bright spots blinding. The level of detail on the models has also been improved. You can now see the individual grooves on the sights of the Master Chief's assault rifle. The recently departed Bungie head, Alex Seleman, made good on his promise that "Halo 2 will graphically be an order of magnitude" better than Halo.

On display, though significantly less impressive, was a short video trailer for Project Gotham Racing 2—the arrival sheets that characterized the first game were still in evidence. Both games such as Wreckless and Rallisport Challenge having changed the expectations of both vehicle modeling and environments, Bizarre Creations will have to work harder to make an impact this time around.

Highlights of the event included a playable Xbox Live level of Unreal Championship (see page 38), which featured play with Digital Extremes' team members in Canada, playable copies of Blinx, Hit Tony Sweeper, Splinter Cell, Steel Battalion (complete with giant controller and somewhat slow gameplay), and a trip over at EA's latest James Bond adventure, Nightfire, which has, for the first time since Goldeneye, a Bond that actually looks like Pierce Brosnan. He also got our hands on excellent versions of both Midtown Madness 3 and the over-the-top new fighting franchise, Legend of Tao Ping—both of which played excellently and bode well for a varied and fun future for the Xbox game library.

Now if they could just see their way to moving Halo 2 up to, say, Christmas...

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Fear consumes you.
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COMPUTER ANTICHRIST
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THE THING

DEAD OR ALIVE XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL

That's the way the, uh, beach ball bounces ...

To accurately simulate the strategic depth and complexity of professional volleyball, Tecmo's Team Ninja frontman Tomonobu Itagaki knew he would have to rely on the talents of a team of highly-trained experts. The kind of people who would know how best to implement the sport's nuances—you know, the complex set plays, delicate feints, subtle hand signs, punishing spikes and intricate gameplay manifestations that give the sunny, sandy game of volleyball its strategic clout.

He knew that... but decided not to bother. Who needs gameplay when you've got Dead or Alive's female brawlers Tina, Kasumi and an entourage of bounteously full-breasted playmates to get to grips with? Okay, so we're joking... but what else do you expect?

To be fair, while any hopeful souls expecting a full-blown ye... simulation are sure to be disappointed, Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball should at least have what it takes to compete with Aldo's recent volleyball team fare, Beach Spikers on Gamecube. That is, plenty of silly, bouncy, bump, set and spike action on a tropical island location that conveniently doubles as the official location for Dead or Alive 4.

Famed game designer Yu Suzuki, in a recent interview with MSNBC, should perhaps the best take on Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball: "Vague Bob, big hopeless."

Dev: Team Ninja • Pub: Tecmo • Release: Fall 2003

3D OH NO? [illegible]

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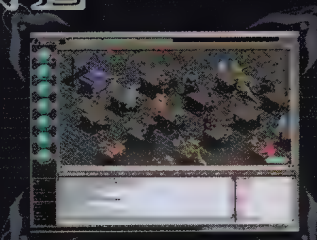

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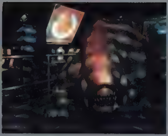
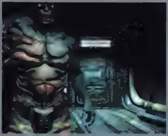
Once more unto...
Is Xbox 2 on its way?

I may have eaten *Halo 3*...

[illegible]

DOOM III: THE LEGACY
The king is back





id Software's wunderkind programmer John Carmack can write his own rulebook these days. When he announced several years ago that id's hotly anticipated Quake 3 would have no [illegible] single-player game, and would [illegible] instead on multiplayer, many in the gaming community thought he'd gone nuts. Still, Quake 3 was a huge success. Likewise, many were shocked to hear that Carmack and co. would reverse themselves, focusing again on single-player with a return to their original breakthrough series, Doom. Early footage of Doom III has long since put any doubts to rest, as the game is shaping up to be one of the most eagerly anticipated titles of 2003.

At Quakecon 2002, the yearly [illegible]

[illegible]

"[illegible] which will look exactly like the PC version."

BMX XXX [illegible]

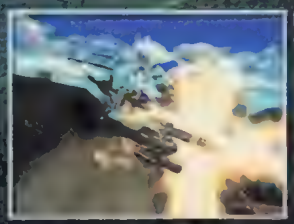
DVD REBATE A-OK! [illegible]

MICROSOFT MAKES MERRY [illegible]

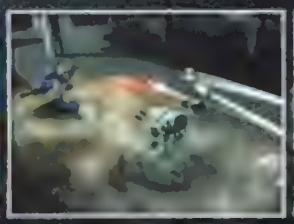
It weighs 3 tons.

It occupies 100 square feet.

And it's hiding right in front of your face.



Cloak yourself to hide from enemies or launch a stealth attack.



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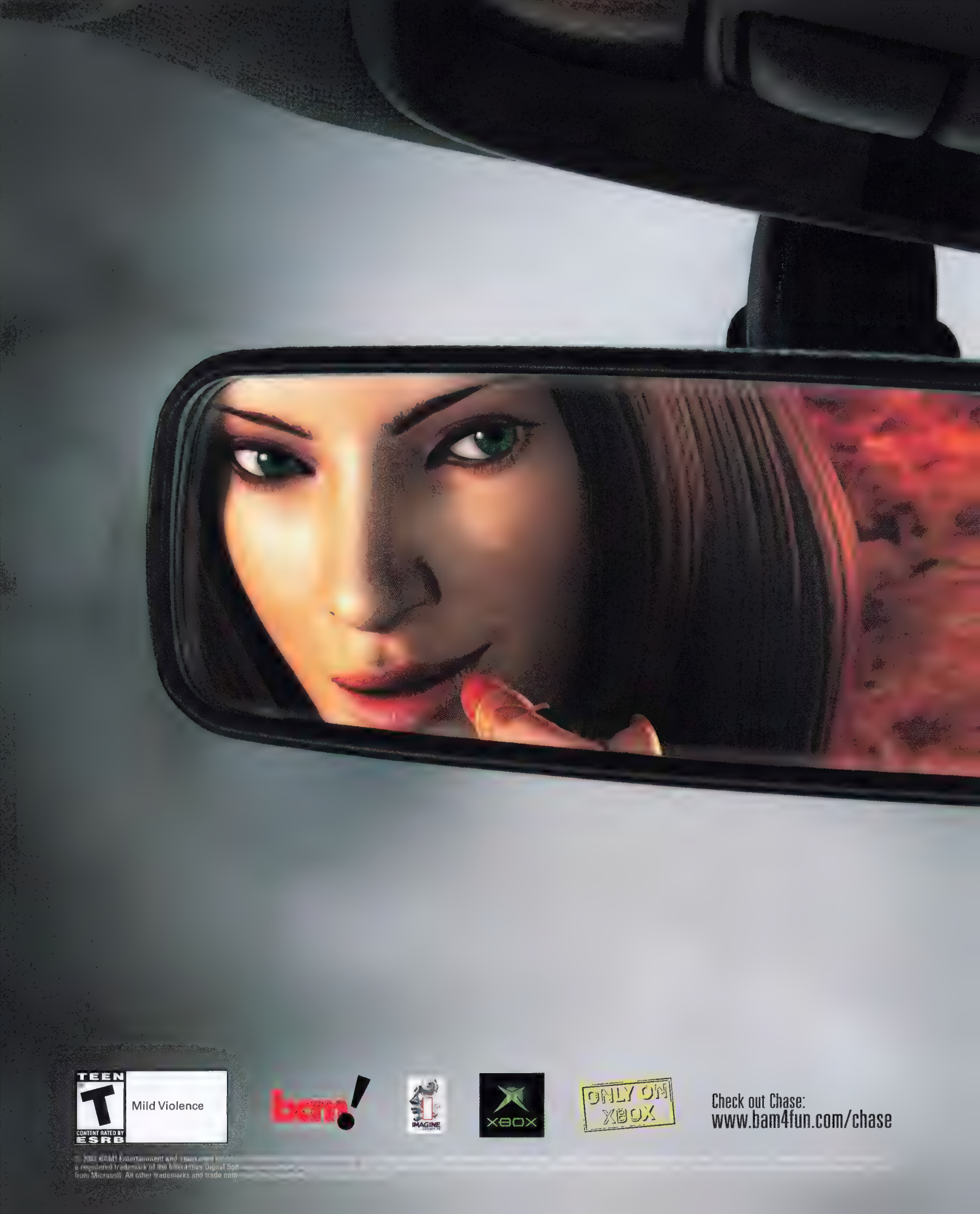
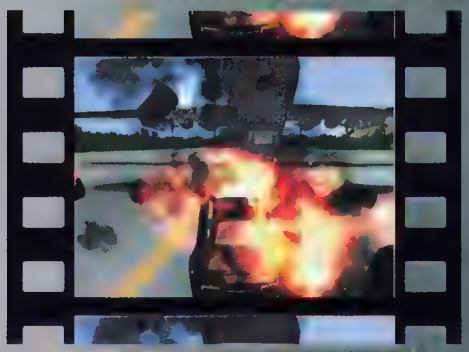

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB
Mild Violence
bam!
IMAGINE
XBOX
ONLY ON
XBOX
Check out Chase:
www.bam4fun.com/chase

Turning Tricks September 2002.

CHASE
Hollywood Stunt Driver



Take the wheel as daredevil stunt driver Chase Carter and hold your rep in Hollywood.

NTK

All the news you Need To Know

01. $250 Steel

[illegible]

02. Blasteriffic ...

[illegible]

03. Stick it

[illegible]

04. Still burning

[illegible]

05. "Snakes?"

[illegible]

06. Privates parts

[illegible]

TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Use of Alcohol
Gambling
Violence

SEGA

www.xbox.com/shenmue2

ONLY ON XBOX

XBOX

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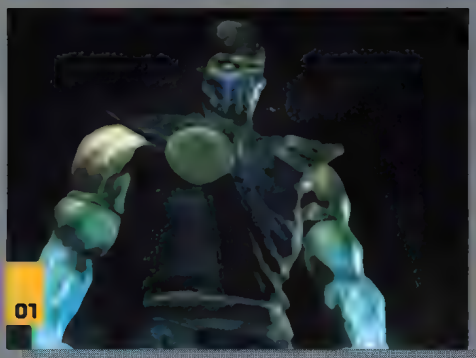
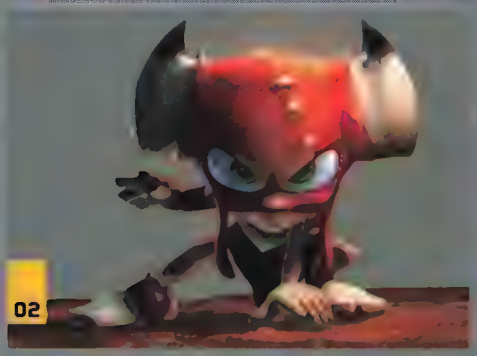
NTK
All the news you Need To Know





01. On deadly ground

Mildly amiss nothing if not persistent, plans yet another iteration of its ultra-violent fighting series Mortal Kombat. Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance, due this fall, contains an all-new fighting system that allows a combatant to switch one of three different combat styles mid-match and weapons-based brawling, motion fighting effects (such as smoke and blood), new characters, and full-fledged 3D environments. Hopefully. The game will not contain more than 20 characters, 12 of which are the same character model only colored differently, and blue, babalities, friendships, and the outcomes that mortal kombat kombat kinds fans of mortal kombat 4.

02. Hey, hey!

Monkey Ball Deluxe, get from Hanoi Monkey and Trade are hard at work creating Xbox an action game featuring a cartoonish cute core boy who can transform himself into a marketing "ball of amicable, or a flying squirrel. The game will feature time trials, six Trick Mode Trials (the same ones as multiplayer times in a quest to recover his beloved candy stolen from Monkey Island by Dr. Tomkatoa, in addition to transforming into various beasts, little boy Trick will also be able to endow his opponents with a power. Trick is scheduled to arrive in 2003.

03. Focused

Featuring a wide roster of European cars that now includes the Peugeot 206 Hybrid, Team Sniper Rally is likely to be the best rally game out there when it arrives some time this winter. Aiming to alleviate the very casual Rallisport Challenge, Codemaster's baby features the most detailed cars yet seen in a videogame. Each one is fully destructible, and is built in layers that will allow to reveal the frame and mechanics beneath the body should you say accidentally plow into a tree at 150 mph. It beats the heck out of NASCAR. That's for sure.

04. Tiger milked

In the sports pages of newspapers, you don't seem to go a week without another dreadful Tiger pun. If a player is gaining on him, then he's "catching Tiger by the tail." If Tiger bloods is winning, then he's "on the prowl." Presumably if he's losing badly, it's "Tiger tanks." Where are you going with this? Just curious. —Ed. In EA's Tiger Woods Golf, you get to, perhaps, "tame the Tiger," or, uh, even play as him. In keeping with Woods' broad teen appeal opportunity, EA has added some suitably extreme elements to the play, including clubbing your opponent to death with a 1 iron and stealing his car. Actually, that's not part of the game. Tiger Woods 2?

05. Good vibrations

Crimson Sea now one of the most intriguing Xbox titles to emerge at E3. Made by Japanese game developer Koei (Dynasty Warriors 3), Sea promises to be a futuristic combat game pitting a cadre of maximum users with unique weapons and attacks against an alien horde. A promotional movie for the game was outside astounding, and Koei claims that 1,000 characters will be shown on screen at one time. The game will have a special shaking feature system that allows players to determine an enemy "attack" distance and location via the Xbox controller's vibration and game sounds.

06. Mech war, not love

For those with an appetite for slobberingly fast mech action, Kemco Software has just arrived in Muralkomic in Japan, a full-on 3D shoot 'em up that's almost a futuristic mech remake to classic Taito racer Chase HQ. A special forces group assigned to protect a new Chinese mech manufacturing mech technology, the Muralkomic pilot a range of super fast Artificial Reflexive Kinetocode vehicles to turn down bad guys. Due some increasingly frenetic first-person swapping between gigantic skyscrapers, armed to the hilt with devastating weapons. Check out

VIDEO GAME HAS-BEENS

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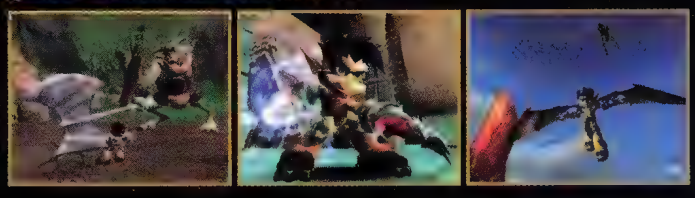

TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB — Violence

XBOX PlayStation 2 NINTENDO GAMECUBE Acclaim

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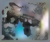
Xbox sales chart
Top-selling Xbox titles

01 
Halo
Best. Game. Ever!

02
NCAA Football 2003
Fourth and fun.

03
Bruce Lee
Lee is dead. Bury the game.

04
Morrowind
The first Xbox RPG soars ...

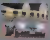
05
Spider-Man
He does whatever a spider can.

06
Outlaw Golf
Golf with strippers. Enough said.

07
Hunter: The Reckoning
The hunt is on.

08
Test Drive
It's the journey and not the destination.

09
007: Agent Under Fire
Agent's on fire!

10 
Project Gotham
Racing rules ...

Most Wanted
[illegible]

Unreal Championship
It's reality. It's great.

Panzer Dragoon
We "Orta" be playing this game right now.

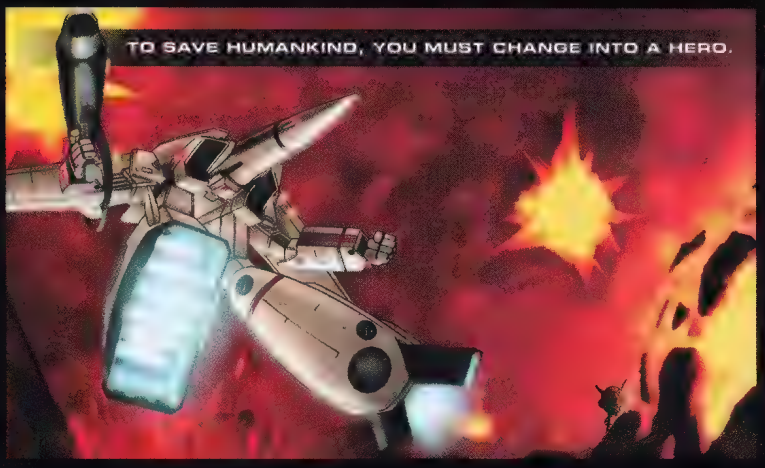
Halo 2
Master Chief, please hurry. We need you.

Lord of the Rings
We've gotta hobbit! Get it? Hobbit? Hah!

Psychonauts
A mind is a terrible thing to waste.

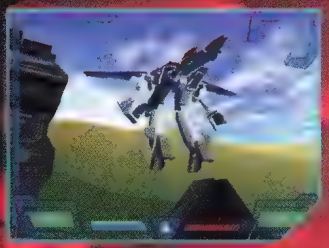
LISTBOT
What's coming next...

Title	Publisher	Genre	Release
Armada 2: Star Command	Metro 3D	Action/Sim	Early 2003
Batman: Dark Tomorrow	Kemco	Action	November 2002
Brute Force	Microsoft	Action	November 2002
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge	Microsoft	Action	Spring 2003
Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Tecmo	Sports	November 2002
Defender	Midway	Shooter	November 2002
Doom III	Activision	Action	2003
Dragon's Lair	Ubi Soft	Action	November 2002
Dronez	Metro 3D	Action	Spring 2003
Dungeons & Dragons Heroes	Infogrames	Action	Spring 2003
Fatal Frame	Tecmo	Action	October 2002
FIFA Soccer 2003	EA	Sports	November 2002
Fuel	Dreamcatcher	Action	October 2002
Ghost Recon	Ubi Soft	Action	November 2002
Harry Potter: Chamber of Secrets	EA	Platform	November 2002
Hitman 2	Eidos	Action	October 2002
House of the Dead 3	Sega	Zombie Killin'	October 2002
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb	LucasArts	Action	November 2002
James Bond 007: Nightfire	EA	Action	November 2002
Legends of Wrestling 2	Acclaim	Sports	October 2002
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	Universal Interactive	Fighting	October 2002
Malice	Sierra	Action	November 2002
Marvel vs. Capcom 2	Capcom	Action	November 2002
Medal of Honor: Frontline	EA	Action	October 2002
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	Action	Holidays 2002
Midtown Madness 3	Microsoft	Sports	Spring 2003
Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance	Midway	Fighting	Nov./Dec. 2002
NBA 2K3	Sega	Sports	October 2002
NHL 2K3	Sega	Sports	November 2002
Pro Race Driver	Infogrames	Sports	Spring 2003
Rainbow Six: Raven Shield	Ubi Soft	Action	December 2002
[illegible]	Simon & Schuster	Action	November 2002
Shenmue II	Microsoft	RPG	November 2002
Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	Action	November 2002
Starsky and Hutch	Empire	Action	December 2002
Star Wars: Jedi Knight 2	LucasArts	Action	November 2002
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	Lucasarts	Action	Spring 2003
State of Emergency	Rockstar	Fighting	Spring 2003
Steel Battalion	Capcom	Action	December 2002
Superman	Infogrames	Action	November 2002
ToeJam and Earl III	Sega	Buddy	Oct./Nov. 2002
Tony Hawk 4	Activision	Sports	Oct./Nov. 2002
Unreal Championship	Infogrames	Action	November 2002
Vexx	Acclaim	Action	November 2002
Whacked!	Microsoft	Action	October 2002
X-Men: Next Dimension	Activision	Fighting	October 2002



CHANGE OR DIE.

ROBOTECH BATTLECRY



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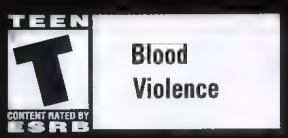

PlayStation.2

GAME BOY ADVANCE

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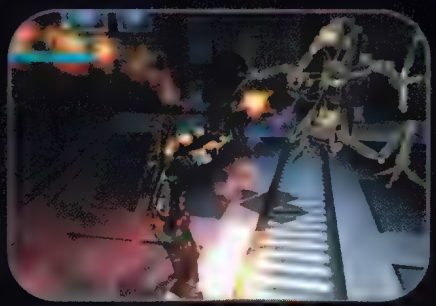
XBOX AND PS2 SCREENSHOTS SHOWN



IT'S ALWAYS DARKEST BEFORE THE DAWN.

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DAWN OF FATE

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TEEN
T
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

PARADIGM ENTERTAINMENT

PlayStation.2

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ATARI

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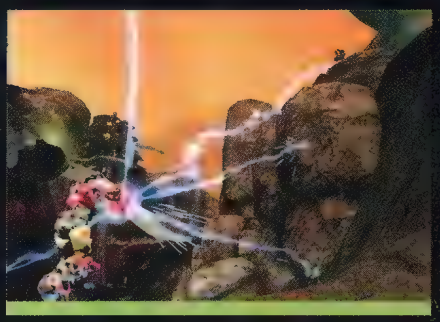


UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Digital Extremes plays matchmaker: *Unreal Championship* may finally signal a full-blown marriage between online gaming and the ever-elusive sofa

It's rare to find a development studio as inviting as Digital Extremes. Hidden off the beaten path in the small Canadian city of London (roughly 120 miles outside of Toronto), the studio was founded by James Schmaltz, whose original *Unreal* brought the PC gaming community to its sunlight-starved knees back in 1997.

It's a warm, sunny day in London, and equally so inside the building which Digital Extremes calls home. Copies of *Adbusters* magazine lie open in the front lobby; several vegan game designers reside on staff; two lovely women named Evelyn and Shannon prepare a nutritious home-cooked meal for lunch each and every day; artists and programmers even *interact* with one another.

Essentially, the setting is decidedly more serene than most videogame development studios ... *particularly* those of the first-person shooter variety. No half-chugged bottles of Mountain Dew surrounding the monitors. No turned-inside-out-and-licked-clean Dorito bags greasing up the furniture. Simply put, Digital Extremes feels like a healthy place to be making videogames.

Maybe all of this positive energy stems from the team finding itself in a rather enviable position. Not only is *Unreal Championship* one of the year's most eagerly anticipated titles, but it may also represent a landmark release in the history of console gaming. For despite its ongoing flirtation, online console gaming has never become the mass-market reality the development community needs it to become. And the simple fact is that the combination of Xbox Live and *Unreal Championship* may indeed be the greatest leap yet toward reaching that goal.

This is, of course, not the first time such a marriage has been proposed. Sega's matchmaking potential was the first to be tested, and its initial online attempt with Dreamcast was nothing if not valiant. Despite a slew of solid titles (including several top-notch sports games and an impressive port of Epic's own *Unreal Tournament*) and backing from an enormous marketing push (free Dreamcasts for those willing to sign up for two years of service), an undersized user base and narrowband access left the SegaNet dream entirely half-baked.

Now the timing is better. Broadband connections are common, if not ubiquitous, and almost certainly represent a higher percentage of the Xbox installed base than that of any other console. And as much as it pains us to say so, it may just require a company with the resources (read: $crilla) of Microsoft to make something of this magnitude come to fruition. Coming out of the gate, *Unreal Championship* is Xbox Live's only true thoroughbred.

HANDS ON

Unreal Championship preserves the same not-so-lofty premise as the original *Unreal Tournament*. Here's the gist: As a competitor in a futuristic sports league, you're pitted against up to 15 other bloodthirsty contestants in indoor and outdoor arenas, armed with shock rifles, plasma grendaes, and other fun and interesting implements with which to kill one another. It's not rocket science, but it's roughly as addictive as chocolate crack and a stupendously cathartic stress reliever.

And the game is *fast*. Anyone who has played *Unreal Tournament* on the PC knows that its lightning speed and high kill rates are a far cry from the relatively slower, more methodical strategy of multiplayer *Halo*. Minor intrusions—like gravity, momentum, and all other manner of physics—are drastically exaggerated in favor of speed and impossibly high kill rates. It's like *Halo* chased with a double-shot of espresso.

As we gather around Digital Extremes' widescreen 56-inch television to play *Unreal Championship* (on its equally enormous black wraparound sofa), it's clear that the team has put a great deal of time and energy into perfecting the game's most essential element—the finely tuned, supremely responsive control that has made *Unreal* so infinitely playable with a mouse and keyboard. As we tear across the game's enormous, post-apocalyptic landscapes, it's clear that the game has come leaps and bounds closer to its final form.

Though intimidating at first, a bit of practice (and unlearning *Halo*) goes a long way with *Unreal Championship*. In the single day we have to familiarize ourselves with the game's hyper-kinetic pacing, the Xbox controller becomes increasingly more comfortable in our hands. While the team members are still tearing us to pieces (they've been playing the game for, well, years), we've even managed to sneak in several sniper-rifle kills...a task which at first appeared preposterously difficult. Assuming that the development team was not taking a proverbial "dive" in order to give us an artificial leg up, this certainly bodes well for *Unreal* newbies who might be going online with the game for the first time.

Some time after our playtest, the team members disperse and scurry back to their respective workspaces; Microsoft has demanded a polished, playable demo by next week, and there's little time for lounging.

Within seconds a young boy—surely a gift from the magazine playtesting gods—stumbles into the room and asks us if he can join us in a game. We gladly hand him a Controller S and, within minutes, watch as he begins picking off *UC*'s infamous 'Bots by the dozen. To this day we still have no idea who this boy was, but his comfort in front of *Unreal Championship* is encouraging.

As for the notoriously intimidating online community which will surely develop? Though it might sound like something of a cop-out, one of *UC*"s lead programmers makes a good point. "To be honest, it's simply a matter of input devices. As long as everyone's on a level playing field and the game feels good...well, that's about all we can do." Indeed.

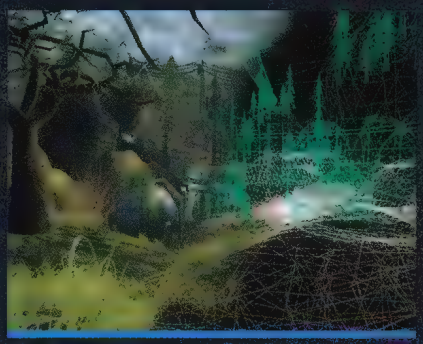
GRAPHICS AND TECHNOLOGY

The team is proud to point out that *Unreal Championship* (Xbox) and *Unreal Tournament 2003* (PC) are "essentially the same core game," and this in itself an extradorinary feat. For the first time in history, a console can hold up its end of the deal: *UC* employs almost precisely the same technology as its PC counterpart, meaning that its nuts and bolts will represent the current state of the art in first-person shooter technology when it ships this winter. Not so much a port as a simultaneous cross-platform release, the significance of this shift in the console/PC power struggle will certainly not go unnoticed.

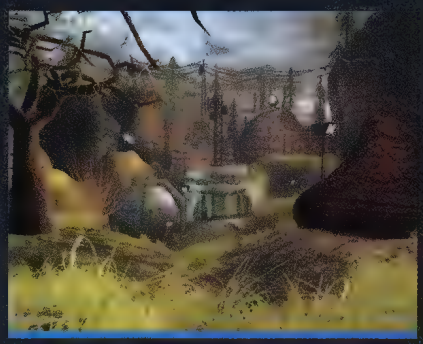
Due to the more gradual evolution of PC chip technology—as well as the ongoing nature of PC development and its impassioned userbase—the *Unreal* engine has now been continuously refined and polished for more than seven years on the PC. This is a rare feat in the traditionally "bumpier" road of console technology, where more extreme/less frequent upgrades—as well as the lack of a persistent online developement community—prevent such gradual improvements. The Xbox's PC-friendly architecture means that the team is now further developing its core technology with a console in mind, rather than porting/reworking/compromising preexisting technology to fit the confines of the traditionally lower-end console hardware.

Quite simply, t's a new scenario.

Upon booting up, it's immediately apparent that *UC* is one of the few games thus far to make your Xbox hum. Outdoor environments in particular are gorgeously rendered, with rock-strewn mountainsides reaching high into the smoldering skies and the heavy, lumbering shadows of giant redwoods swaying slowly underfoot. The volumetric grass is particularly impressive, and the prodigious use of particle effects is fantastic: glowing neon lights bespeckle a lusciously green jungle landscape while long, fluorescent bulbs hang menacingly above dark laboratory hallways. Very atmospheric stuff.



UC's levels are staggeringly complex. Here we see the unfinished wireframe version of the map ...



Note the beautiful volumetric grass—one of the game's many impressive uses of the Xbox GPU

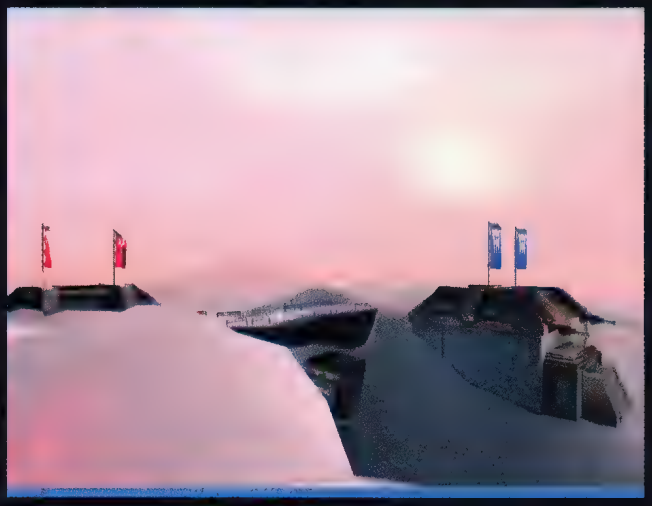
Perhaps most impressive are the outdoor environments in *UC*. Remember the old *G.I. Joe* action figure commercials? The ones where two suspiciously exuberant young boys would be playing with their Snake Eyes and Major Bludd figurines on the most gloriously combat-friendly hills and mountainsides? Well your persistence has finally paid off: *UC*'s earthy outdoor environments are the closest videogames have come to those craggy, rock-strewn and perfectly battle-worthy locales from those commercials of yore.

Though they have great respect for Bungie, the team points out that *Halo*'s multiplayer levels are decidedly "simple"—and looking at the games side by side, *XBN* cannot disagree. Seeing the sheer wealth of geometry and visual effects on any given level of *UC*, it's hard not to be impressed. And while the game does not employ any bump-mapping, it's a gorgeous game that will not disappoint.

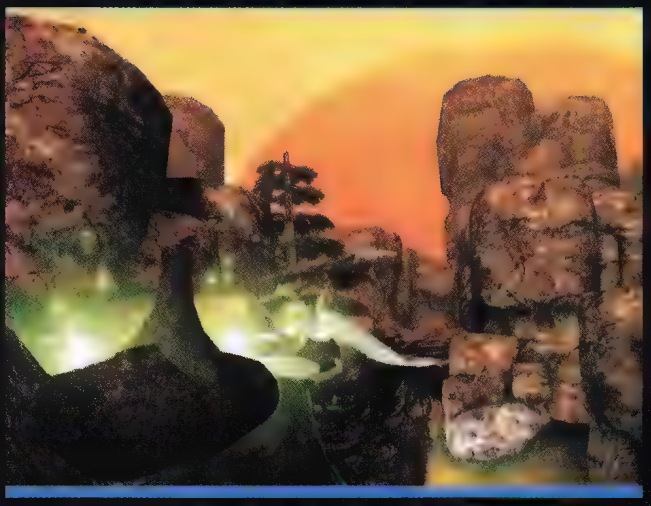
MASTER LEVEL DESIGNERS PICK THEIR FAVORITE MAPS

James Schmalz, Founder and Creative Director:
I have two favorite maps. The first is Eye of Jahan; it has a dramatic setting in the eye of a sandstorm, and really shows off the Bombing Run gametype to its fullest. Maul is my other favorite, because it was the first one I put together after all the core elements of the game were in place. I was able to build [it] and immediately play it afterward—it was a very exciting development moment.

Scott McGregor, Level Designer:
I am most proud of CTF-LostFaith. The waterfall and river took an *enormous* amount of tweaking to get right, and I'm pretty proud of how it turned out in the end. Overall the setting feels unique and is extremely cool to play in.



Bastiaan "Checker" Frank, Level Designer:
I'm proud of my newest Bombing Run map. It's situated on the Alleria Homeworld, the planet covered in ice and snow. The setting is pretty unique, the sun is just rising up from the horizon, casting long light blue shadows across the snowy landscape. Even though it's a very small level, it has a nice twist to the layout and thereby the flow of the gameplay.



Dave Ewing, Lead Level Designer:
The level I'm most proud of has to be DM-Antalus. I worked a long time tweaking the flow of this map and adding in several special areas that can only be reached by skillful use of the controller and the lifts strategically placed around the map. The outdoor visuals done with the help of James Schmalz and Mike Leatham are some of the best seen to date in any FPS console game, in my opinion.

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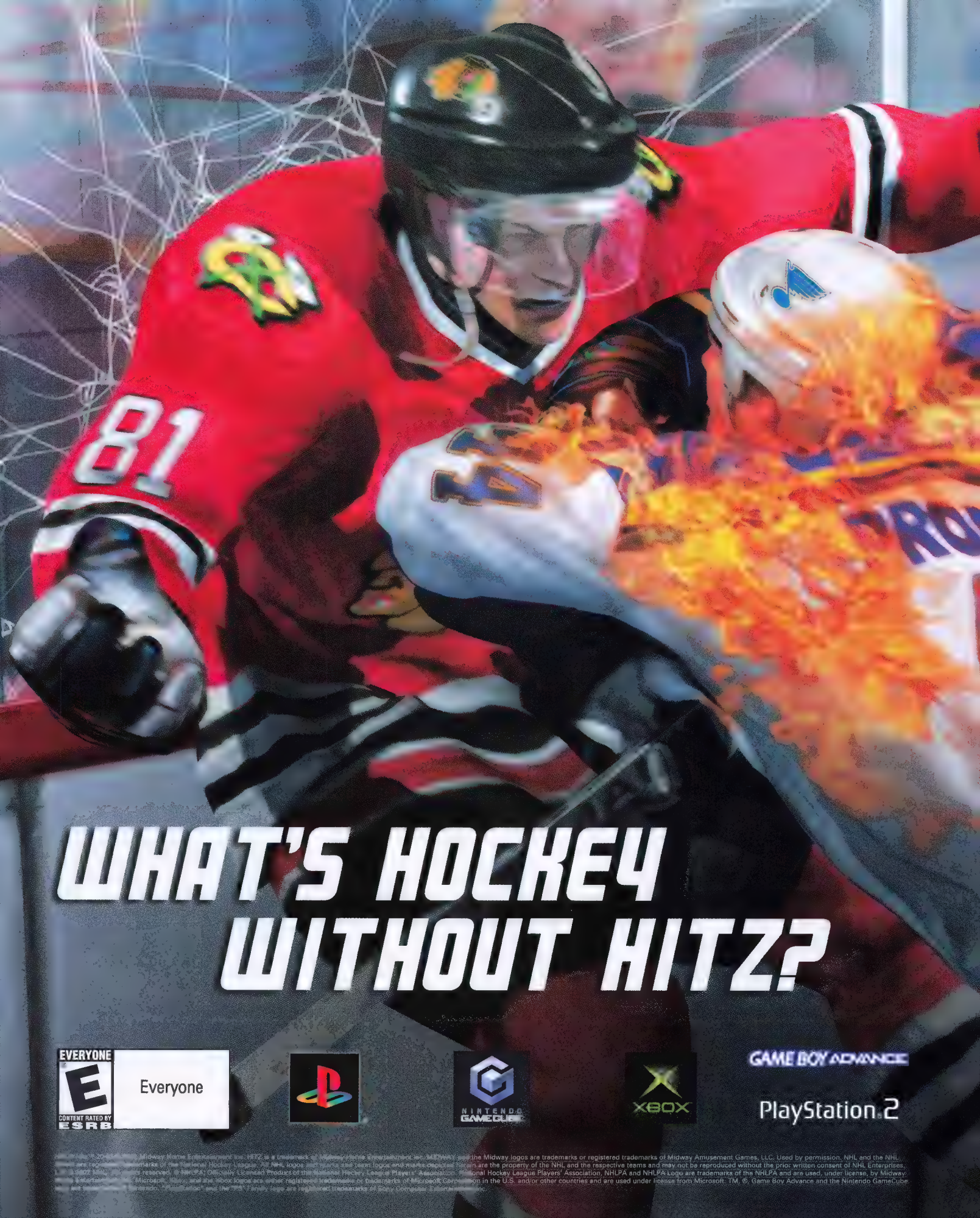

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ONLINE

Under close scrutiny from Microsoft, the development team has made sure that getting *Unreal Championship* up and running online will be easy enough for even the most technically incompetent gamer—two brief menu screens and you're up and running.

The game will support up to 16 players on Xbox Live or over a LAN (or any combination of real opponents and computer-controlled 'Bots, up to 16 in total), and there's a split-screen option for playing the game online as well. The Xbox Communicator will allow gamers to target and speak to individual opponents, but broadcasting your screams of, "Suck it down, hosebeast!" to all participating opponents will not be possible due to bandwidth contraints.

There are also plans to provide downloadable content, so you'll be able to snatch new weapons, skins, and maps. (Infogrames has repeatedly hinted that it may make vehicles available for download as well, but has been unable to confirm this rumor as *Xbox Nation* goes to press.)

The lightning gun returns in beautiful fashion...complete with procedural lighting effects. *(Uh, anyone know what a procedural lighting effect is? -Ed.)*

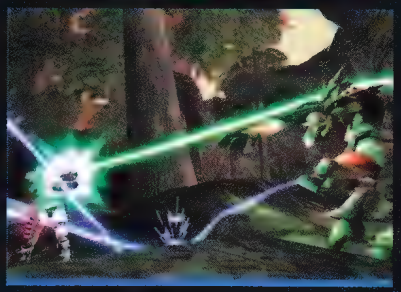
Sadly, the secret of what procedural lighting effects actually *are* died with "XGaMeR5600Bob." We mourn the loss.

GAMEPLAY

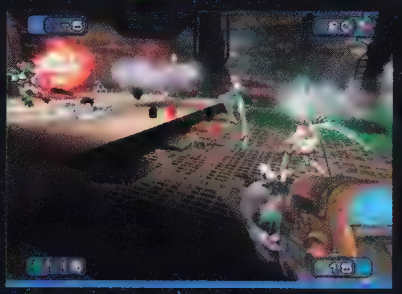
Alongside the sofa comes a host of firmly-established gameplay paradigms and, accordingly, Digital Extremes appears to be paying close attention to making *Unreal Championship* a more console-styled affair. When you retrieve a certain number of adrenaline tablets scattered across the maps, for example, you'll be able to perform special attacks by executing *Hadouken*-style button combos on the controller. (Executing these moves will also increase your overall adrenaline efficiency, providing further incentive to flex those 16-bit skills.) A slick sidestep move has also been introduced (accomplished by tapping either direction on the analog stick), which can be expertly chained into a fancy wall-jump maneuver.

Other notable gameplay tweaks include a *Strider*-style double-jump, as well as the Link Gun weapons which, when combined in an impressive chain of lightning (read: "Don't cross the streams"), encourage both team play and cooperative technique.

Aside from the standard deathmatch, team deathmatch, capture the flag, and domination modes, *UC* also includes a new sports-themed contest. It's called Bombing Run, and it's a lot like rugby...if rugby were to involve shooting the other players with weapons bigger than your leg, and then standing over their bloody corpses firing round after round of hot lead into their soft flesh and screaming, "Who's your daddy!? I said who's—!" Right.



One of *UC*'s graphical missteps is its lack of bump-mapping—character models look very nice, but the textures are simply flat.



The goo gun has returned (by popular demand), and the collection of character models has increased exponentially. The skeleton clown with the top hat also appears to be interested in procedural lighting.

//END

Taken on its own, *Unreal Championship* is not revolutionary, merely evolutionary; the first-person shooter gameplay paradigm has changed little since the original *Doom* deathmatches, and even less since *Unreal Tournament*. Moreover, PC gamers have been playing with their trusty mice and keyboards for years, and many will be reluctant to make the leap to the (arguably) more constricted confines of the Xbox controller.

Whether or not *UC* will ultimately be as refined a console experience as multiplayer *Halo* remains to be seen. The game's blistering speed and unbridled kill-kill-respawn-kill pacing may prove to be more than two analog sticks can handle, and Microsoft's mandate that the game be "sped up by 10 percent" (upon inspection of one of *UC*'s later builds) sounds like arbitrary administrative intervention to *Xbox Nation*.

But with Bungie's *Halo 2* a full year away, it may also be a moot point. After our lengthy playtest of *Unreal Championship*, we've come away extremely impressed by both the game and the team behind it.

So get comfy. The 16-player deathmatch is about to invade your living room, and you don't even need an extra room to accommodate all of the contestants. From our plushy sofa (which, we might add, looks increasingly comfy as this deadline extends), *XBN* eagerly awaits the next chapter of online gaming.

Evan Shamoon

Chicks really dig the trees...

and you'll love the scenery too because the babes from the million-selling fighting game, **Dead or Alive®3** are back! This time, they're setting aside their fighting gear for some **fun-in-the-sun** swimwear and turning up the heat in **Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball™**. This is no ordinary volleyball game - this is volleyball to the extreme with **great gameplay** and **mind-blowing realism**. You'll be able to feel the sand between your toes and the gentle ocean breeze as you compete in the **most outrageous beach volleyball** game yet. Forms carried on the court allow you to customize your babe off of it, with **over 100** different **swimsuits** and **accessories** to choose from. But when the day is done, the fun has just begun! This first ever "**Sports Fantasy Simulation**" boasts a variety of different **nightlife** activities to choose from. Whatever your pleasure, **Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball** promises **extreme action** and a **whole lotta satisfaction!**

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XPRESSLY LIVE

Xbox Nation takes Xbox Live for a Test Drive

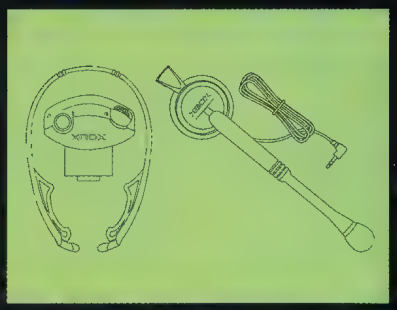
It's August and a young man's fancy has turned to thoughts of broadband football games played against total strangers, giant robot deathmatches fueled by adrenaline and testosterone, and the joys of doling out strange and unusual party-game punishments. In our mind, the Xbox Live Communicator is already strapped to our heads, and we're telling some shlub in Utah that any poor performance on our part may be due to our late-night antics with a certain member of his family.

We are standing at the gates, one lone barbarian screaming to be let in to Microsoft's headquarters (or at least one of the sub-buildings of Microsoft's sprawling campus) to play Xbox Live before the great unwashed masses have access to it, even before beta testing begins . Today, Microsoft's finest will show three online games: *NFL Fever 2003*, *Whacked*, and *MechAssault*. Together with such titles as *Unreal Championship*, *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon*, and Sega Sports' *NBA 2K3* and *NFL 2K3*, these games will form the backbone of Xbox Live.

Before too long, we are seated in a conference room with a controller in our hands and the first of three games is booting up on a large screen in front of us. We can't help but feeling this is somehow momentous, though we are, for the life of us, unable to say just why. We are online, and we are live.

Let the games begin.

COMMUNICATE



THE COMMUNICATOR

A handy-dandy device, the Xbox Live Communicator is both functional and comfortable. The device, which plugs into the Xbox controller via a special card, rests against the back of a player's head, and is fully adjustable. The ear piece can go around either the left ear or the right, and the Communicator has such nice features as a directional microphone, voice masking (read: Darth Vader, an annoying kid, Mr. Roboto, etc), noise cancellation, and—most importantly—a mute button.

All hail the mute button.

ONLINE GAME_

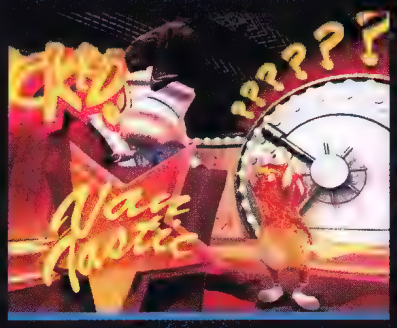
MECH ASSAULT

Goliath, meet David. Our 30-something-ton mech, our miracle, is fighting against a flea. Our opponent has chosen to control an Elemental, essentially a teeny, tiny man in a suit of powered armor. Though the Elemental is zipping all over the place, hopping into the air, and making a nuisance of itself, it can't really hurt our robot. Maybe if there were six of them, they might tear us to shreds; Microsoft hasn't yet said how many will be able to compete in an online game at one time, but eight seems a safe bet.

Buildings crumble and implode when struck. Smoke puffs out from the destruction. It's all very pretty, and will get prettier when Microsoft augments the game with downloadable content

■ Somewhere, there's a tiny gnat that wants squishing, but we're too busy paying attention to how smoothly the game runs online to care...

ONLINE GAME_



WHACKED

To be honest, *Whacked* is like the ugly girl you bring to the prom because all of the good ones are taken. It's a decent enough party game but, frankly, its appeal is limited. The characters, all of them videogame representations of the seven deadly sins, are not at all intriguing. The game also sports weapons that are quite silly, but not very fun to use—just imagine the raw thrills you can have whacking the opposition with a staple gun! With a wealth of potentially great online titles coming out for Xbox Live, *Whacked* may get buried.

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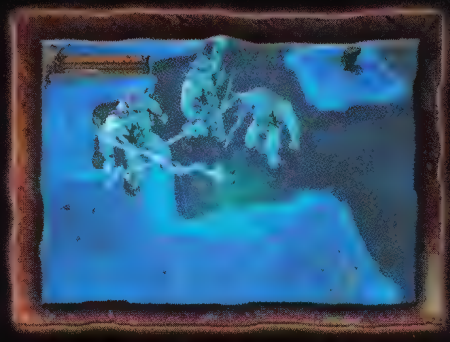

ENCOUNTER MYSTICAL BEASTS

EXPLORE FANTASTIC ENVIRONMENTS

"Xbox owners will receive one fine game in the form of Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance."
– IGN.com

"Like Gauntlet, in the same way that a Ferrari is like a Fiat."
– Official Xbox Magazine

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Blood
Violence
Use of Alcohol

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XBOX

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NBA 2K3

NBA 2K3 promises to continue the series' legacy of hardwood dominance. Expect a similar online interface to that of *NFL 2K3*—including an AIM-like buddy list of your favorite opponents, and four vs. four head-to-head online play (limited by the number of controller ports, not bandwidth). Visual Concepts has also implemented an amazing graphical effect in the form of specular highlights; as the game wears on, you'll be able to see the sweat accumulate on each player's body. This simulated sweat not only looks all shiny and pretty, but it also helps you gauge how fatigued each player with just a quick glance.

Mmm...*simulated sweat.*

GHOST RECON

Set in the year 2008 (which is, ironically, the year Ziff Davis management plans on taking *Xbox Nation* monthly), *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon* is a "realistic" first person shooter. Players become part of an elite special force known as the Ghosts—named for their stealthy, silent approach to operations. Gameplay is similar to the squad-based combat in *Rainbow Six*, but with more expansive environments in which to deploy your troops. The console versions of *Ghost Recon* will contain both the original game and the eight-level expansion pack *Desert Siege*, and UbiSoft is planning to support up to 16 players online. While sim-nuts may enjoy it, *XBN* wasn't particularly inspired ...

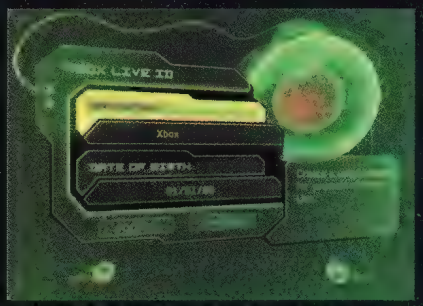
NFL 2K3 + NFL FEVER

START SEQUENCE_

SIGN UP, SOLDIER

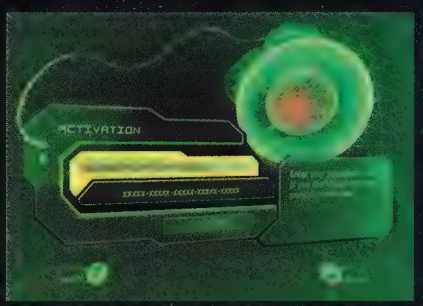
A monkey could log onto Xbox Live in five easy steps. First of all, a broadband connection, (either DSL or Cable modem, but sadly, not satellite DSL) is required. Your local phone company or ISP will be able to help you find a broadband plan that suits your needs. If you're sharing broadband between your computer and Xbox, you'll need a hub or a router, but fear not, as instructions for hooking these things up can be found in the Xbox Live Starter Kit ($49.95). The five-minute sign-in process includes choosing your screen name, entering your subscription code, and credit card info. From there, you're online. Now play away ...

■ Step 1: The starter kit boots a new menu for you that allows you to manage all of your online XBL related stuff.

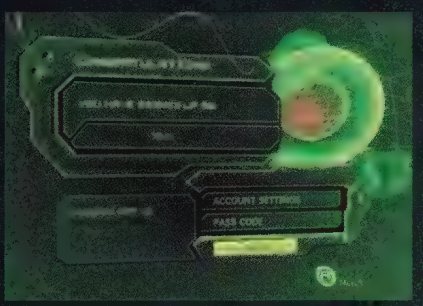


■ Step 2: Put in your Gamer Tag. Choose your name wisely, as this will stay with you across all games.

■ Step 3: Click "Yes."



■ Step 4: Input your secret subscription code that comes with the Xbox Live Starter Kit.



■ Step 5: Pat yourself on the back. Your soul is now owned by Bill Gates, who can now track your every breath ...

[THEY CAN SEE IT]
[THEY CAN TASTE IT]
[THEY CAN SMELL IT]
[THEY CAN HEAR IT]

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Violence

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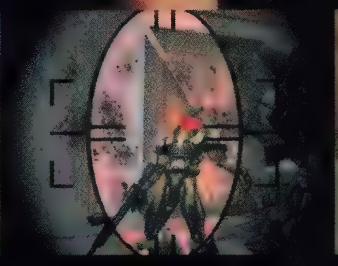

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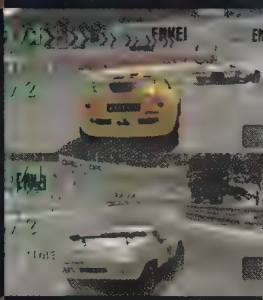

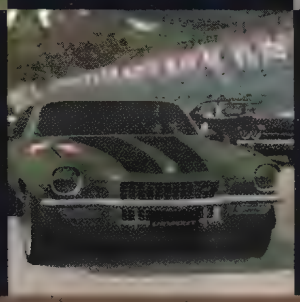

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- GT 2002 Mode - Win races, events, and licenses
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WORDS BY PAUL YOON

ALTERED BEAST

Remember, kids—don't try this at home ...

It began with a tiny dot and a secret room hidden inside *Adventure* for the Atari 2600. This seemingly innocuous bit of fluff opened the floodgates for secrets in games and devices to discover them. Gaming history is laden with developers hiding Easter eggs in their programs and players trying every possible combination of button pushing, D-pad twirling, and joystick fiddling to uncover them. At a certain point gaining unlimited ammo or making a hero explode in midair just wasn't enough and thus was born the GameShark. The GameShark peripheral was, in a lot of ways, an ingenious device. It allowed players to tamper with the information contained in a console's own RAM to create new game codes. It was arguably the first commercially produced hacker's tool for videogame consoles.

Way back in November 2001, Microsoft introduced what it hoped would be a revolutionary new gaming device—a canonical console, if you will. It was blazingly fast, had an 8-gigabyte hard drive, back-bar video capabilities, came with an Ethernet connection, and was made almost entirely out of parts that anyone could purchase at a computer store. The Xbox was indeed a revolution of sorts, but not necessarily in the way Microsoft had hoped...

In a way, the Xbox is the hacker's ultimate plastic- and microchip-based fantasy. It's inexpensive, made by a corporate monolith, and based on standardized hardware. This makes it a very appealing target for what amounts to distributed hacking—lots of people simultaneously working on a common goal while sharing discoveries and ideas. These kinds of efforts are similar in nature to projects such as Linux and the Search for Extraterrestrial Life at Home aka SETI@Home.

A vast number of dedicated people are working this very moment to ensure that no possible entryway into the Xbox is left unhacked; in fact there's a contest sponsored by the Xbox Linux project (http://xbox-linux.sourceforge.net) to award a total of $200,000 to the first people or organizations to come up with methods to run Linux on an Xbox.

Some people have reported success swapping out their Xbox hard drives, DVD drives, and various chips—which qualifies as hacking, and has, in some cases, increased performance in the Xbox. There is some disagreement about how much foresight Microsoft had in terms of protecting its console against attacks, but at least one person reported receiving a genuinely surprised reaction from a Microsoft representative when asked about its hacking prevention efforts.

The obvious question here is why would hardcore hacking interest the casual gamer? Well, for one thing, there's emulators such as MAME, that'll allow people to play classic arcade and console games. There's the ability to back up games and not worry if the dog/kids/neglected spouse gets a hold of *Halo*. There's bragging rights that come with having the Japanese version of *Metal Gear: The Xtreme Games* months before anyone else. In short, there's lots to intrigue game fans, and that's not even counting the possibilities of being able to run an Xbox-powered Web site or using the hardware as a $200 desktop computer.

METHOD ONE: THE MOD

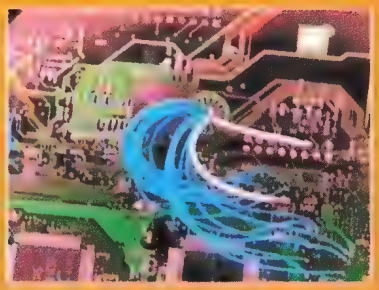
It requires a multimeter and a soldering iron, but installing a mod chip is currently the only way to "expand" your Xbox. And void its warranty.

In the beginning, there was licensing. Because of regional royalties and publishing rights, console manufacturers would disable their machines' ability to play games from anywhere other than where the console was originally purchased—an imported Japanese or European game wouldn't play on a U.S.-native system, for example. Naturally, hardcore game fans were compelled to seek out companies that would make and/or install modification chips, which would then enable them to play the latest titles before they ever were localized for the United States. The legality of this has always been in question; Sony recently won a British court case in which it claimed that the so-called "Messiah" chip circumvented its territorial lockout technology, enabling consumers with modified PlayStation 2s to play not only imported games, but also homemade copies of games.

There are few things more beautiful than an elegantly installed Xbox mod chip. Actually, there are a lot of things. But this is a really bang-up job all the same.

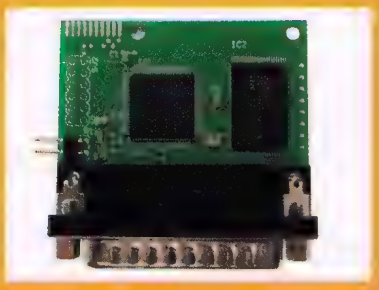
Xbox mod chips have been available for a little while now, and can be found with relative ease. If installed correctly, the chip will allow players to use emulators such as MAME—thus putting them one step closer to the old-school gamer's paradise wherein *Defender* or *Joust* may be played on the Xbox. Even as this is being typed, there are people who have managed to cram emulators for several classic game systems plus game ROMS onto their Xboxes and who are now playing them happily. Like, at this very moment.

This ungainly mass of blue wires is helping to unlock the true potential of this Xbox.



Since we're all thumbs when it comes to molten metal, we'll send our Xboxes out for modding.

It's not all fun and games even after you get your modchip installed. It helps to be console literate.



The more recent generations of modchips have fewer wires to solder, so you might be all right yet.

METHOD TWO: THE SOFTHACK

In the future, you just might be able to plug a widget into your network port and get to booting up *Sonic*, *Phantasy Star*, or *Super Mario Brothers*. Then again, you might not.

The first bootable version of Linux doesn't include video, but it starts up a Web server. This is what you'll see if you HTTP to it.

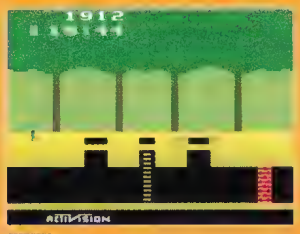
Although modifying an Xbox is a comparatively painless proposition, there are those who would argue (either because of warranty, legality, or cost) that the way to go is a software-only hack. This method, while retaining the Xbox' pristine electronic guts, is a little more involved on the software author's side. In order for an Xbox to even acknowledge that it's being sent instructions, the software needs to be signed, meaning that it's been pre-approved (via an electronic key of sorts) to adhere to Microsoft's standards. In most cases, that means the code has been developed by a Microsoft-approved (and ostensibly licensed) company or individual, since they're the only ones with legitimate access to the official Xbox Development Kit or XDK. For the unscrupulous, there are pirated versions of the XDK which may be used to write code that will be accepted by an Xbox, but that route wouldn't be feasible for any kind of large-scale distribution or organization that wants to stay law-abiding (and thus operational). Xboxes don't like to read writable CDs either, so in all likelihood it wouldn't even be possible to use an XDK to produce discs for personal use. There's a distinct possibility that running personal software without getting an Xbox chipped may never be possible, although that remains to be seen.

NAMEYOURSELF

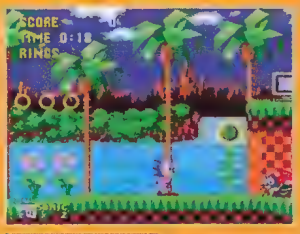
MAME is just the tip of the iceberg—with support for more than 1500 games, though, it's quite a tip. Imagine *not* tripping over those cables connecting your consoles every time you move past your TV.

MAME gets a lot of attention because it is one of the elder emulators, but the appeal of cramming the equivalent of five consoles into a single package weighs heavily on the gamer. We're going to assume that you have a closetful of carts that you can't bear to part with, because that's the key to keeping out of trouble- if you don't own the game already, don't download the ROM. These x-enabled emulators have Microsoft code in them too, which is a no-no.

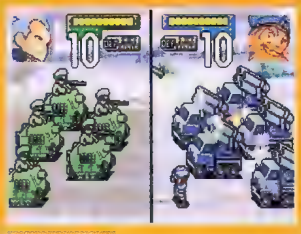
Factoid: *Pac-Man* was almost named Puck-Man. Imagine all the youthful vandalism that would have inspired.



Oh, Pitfall Harry. When will you ever find a love as pure and true as the love you feel for solid-gold bars?



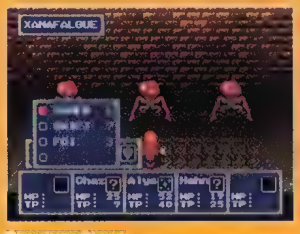
Sonic the Hedgehog. He made us feel good about pushing right on the D-Pad.



War made really cute by our pals at Nintendo. Tanks + flowers + super-deformed characters = gaming bliss.

Read the ultimate description of *River City Ransom*, a really great game, here: www.seanbaby.com/nes/rcr.htm

Equal parts ghoulish and ghostly, this Capcom classic will forever hold a place in our hearts.



Classic RPG elements and cool turn-based fighting made this *Phantasy* a rather pleasant reality.

From here, it's tough to imagine that Microsoft doesn't have something up its sleeve—it's possible that it's just waiting for hackers to get to a certain point before it hammers out the specs for the Xbox mark two in order to make it that much tougher to get into. Maybe its legal counsel is being deliberately kept hungry and angry, to be unleashed upon some unsuspecting hackers...

THE OBSTACLES...

Aside from an unmodded Xbox refusing to talk to unsigned code, would-be hackers have a few more roadblocks before they'll be able to run open-source project programs such as Apache (for Web serving), MAME (a game emulator), or the GIMP (for graphics manipulation) on their stock Xboxes. There's the notable absence of a keyboard and mouse, for instance. On a legal note, the DMCA or Digital Millennium Copyright Act has been invoked in the name of any number of things such as shutting down Internet radio stations and the untimely demise of the Napster network. There is a specific clause in the Act that provides for reverse-engineering of hardware under very specific circumstances, which means that certain types of tampering may be permissable; it would seem that the law is not totally weighted against hackers. Given Microsoft's 880-pound simian inclinations, though, there's a possibility that it could squash a hacker insurgence merely by waving the DMCA in the right direction. And that's not even taking into account what might happen if the Consumer Broadband and Digital Television Promotion Act (CBDTPA) passes, which would make it illegal, or perhaps simply impossible, to duplicate almost all digital media even if it's solely for one's personal use.

Although most existing emulators/programs require bits of Microsoft code in order to work on an Xbox (putting them in murky legal territory, and thus somewhat difficult to find), the Xbox/Linux Project has (as of mid-August) booted a stripped-down version of Linux on a chipped Xbox using nary a byte of propietary code. A year from now, your Xbox could be the cheapest PC you ever bought... ■

HYPERLINKING

Check out the World Wide Web to learn more about hacking the Xbox and its consequences ...

http://www.xenatera.com/bunnie/proj/anatak/xboxmod.html
Dr. Bunnie's Adventures Hacking The Xbox.

http://www.xboxhacker.net
XBOXHACKER—A locus for Xbox hacking with lots of friendly forums.

http://xbox-linux.sourceforge.net
The Linux on Xbox Project. Go there to collect your reward if you manage to get Linux working on an unmodified Xbox.

http://www.eff.org
The Electronic Frontier Foundation. Is what you're about to do legal? Dunno—we're not lawyers. It's a good thing these guys are.

http://www.microsoft.com/xbox
The party line from our pals in Redmond, Wa. Don't expect any support help after you crack that Xbox case, though.

A BOY NAMED BUNNIE

When not building autonomous submarines or dunking silicon in acid, Andrew Huang (aka Bunnie) pokes around in his Xbox. One Ph.D later, he's helped deconstruct some of the Xbox' mystique.

Dwellin' in the lab. Bunnie relaxes among his electronic minions.

Using about $50 worth of equipment and some components he happened to have lying around, Bunnie was able to intercept a boot code as it passed from one part of his Xbox to another. This turned out to be a key development in Xbox hacking, and Bunnie presented his findings in a paper at CHES (Cryptographic Hardware in Embedded Systems) in August. He was also among the first to report that the unique serial number of each Xbox is stored in a digital, readable format—Xbox Live, anyone? We asked him about getting an unmodded Xbox to recognize unsigned code and some other general security questions.

Andrew Huang: The big opportunity for getting code into an unmodified Xbox is through the network port, but not a lot of people have really explored that venue very thoroughly, as most games available don't even turn the network port on...

Xbox Nation: How do you think Microsoft failed in attempting to secure the Xbox? Or did it?

Huang: Well, it's a cost trade-off against manufacture and test vs. security. One approach that keeps things simple is the Nintendo cartridge or proprietary DVD-ROM approach. Nintendo doesn't need all that crypto and fancy security because the Nintendo console on its own is basically of no interest to most people; Microsoft, on the other hand, is hawking a PC, which is of interest to lots of people. Microsoft's strategy backfires here, because arguably, one of the reasons to use an almost 100 percent stock PC platform is to reduce costs and time to market. However, the Xbox is one expensive beast, and it still just barely beat Nintendo to the shelves. Nintendo, on the other hand, breaks even on every console and has not had a big problem with piracy, either.

Aside from my questioning the decision of using standard PC hardware in a game console, Microsoft did just about the right amount of security in their console for the cost it incurred. Security in this case is a deterrent; bulletproof security would add enough cost that it wouldn't make sense.

You just want to deter enough pirates with cheap security measures such that the overall piracy rate is kept at a managable level. Putting too much security in is bad as well, because you're spending more money than you're saving by cracking down on piracy.

I think Microsoft did a pretty good job of hitting that sweet spot. Any hack on the Xbox will probably require a soldering iron, which cuts out a huge part of piracy right there. That's about all they needed to do...

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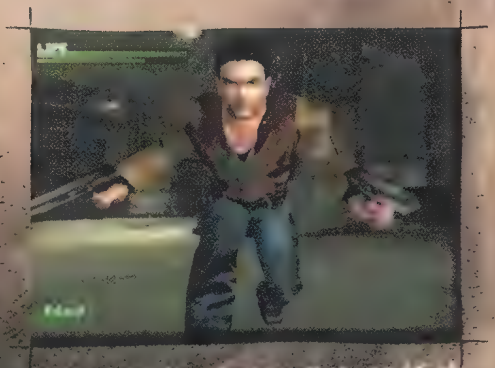
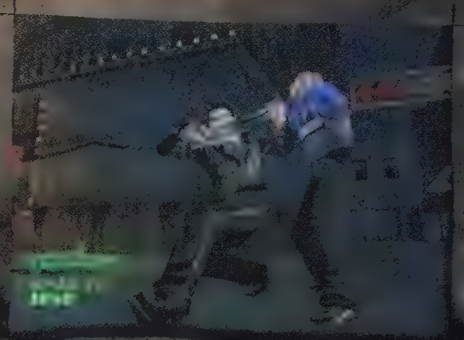


Nothing makes Jack Slate feel warmer inside than giving the gift of flying lead. But Jack will also take. With disarm moves that will take a weapon off a thug so fast it'll make his head spin. With such generosity, the coroner's gonna run out of gift wrap.



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–Entertainment Weekly

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"Hunter comes through as one of the most fun, frenetic, addictive, multiplayer action shoot 'em ups on Xbox, and, most likely any system."
–Official Xbox Magazine

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–Adrenaline Vault

www.interplay.com/hunter

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SPLINTER CELL

"I'm really looking forward to that game [*Splinter Cell*]. It would be great if we could just turn *Splinter Cell* into *Metal Gear Solid X*." —Hideo Kojima, May 2002

"The game was demonstrated for Bill Gates a few days ago. He really liked the thermal goggles."

Matheiu Ferland, lead producer on *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell*, takes a systematic, controlled approach to videogames. As he escorts us through several of Cell's unfinished levels, it's clear that what excites him most about his newest project is undoubtedly the staggeringly convincing manner in which it models reality.

Through Ferland's eyes *Splinter Cell* is, above all else, a simulation.

An alluring admixture of geopolitical intrigue and high-tech gadgetry is what drives Clancy's fiction, and translating this single defining characteristic into the interactive arena this is the primary objective for *Splinter Cell*. Players assume the role of Sam Fisher, a field operative working for a low-profile, black-ops agency called Third Echelon, itself under the jurisdiction of the National Security Agency (NSA). A fanatical terrorist leader is waging war on the United States, and Fisher must travel deep into enemy territory in order to gather intelligence and, eventually, unearth the threat.

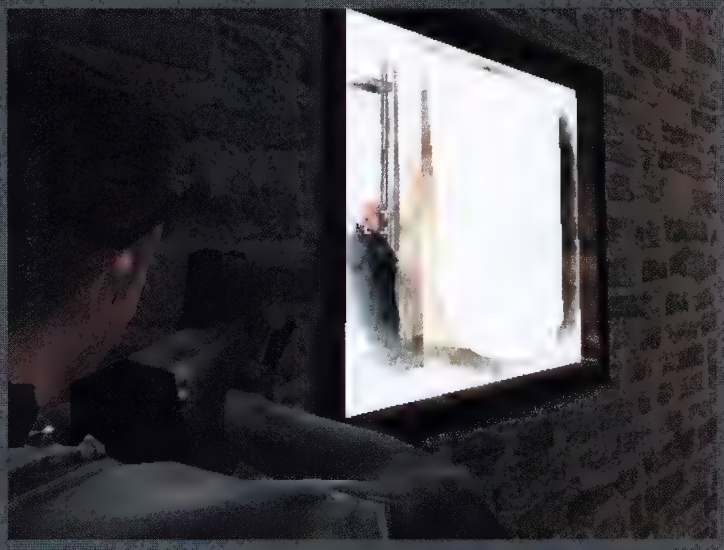
Of course, things aren't always puppy dogs and ice cream in the world of bio-nuclear terrorism: "If there is a failure in his mission," Ferland points out, "the U.S. government will immediately deny all involvement, and Sam Fisher will be hung out to dry." In other words, [illegible] and it's "Snake—Snaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaakke!!!"-time for Agent Fisher.

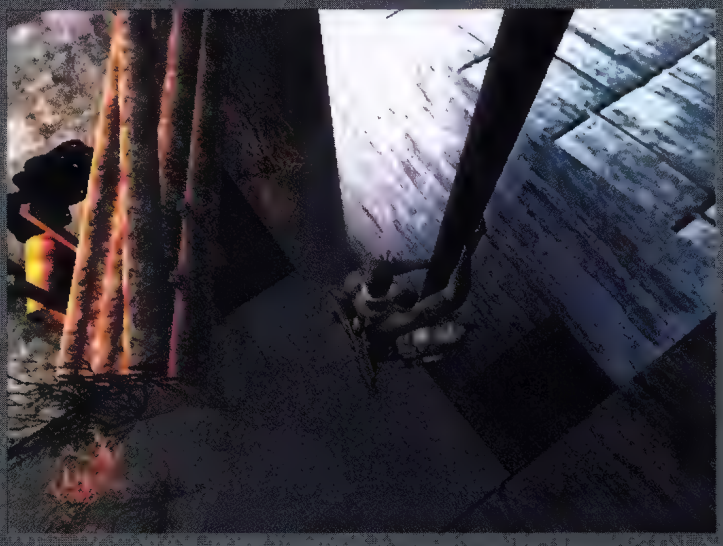
Speaking with Ferland while playing through the mission to which *Xbox Nation* has been granted exclusive access, it becomes exceedingly clear what kind of game *Splinter Cell* truly is. "I would often find myself paying close attention to the small map in the corner, while so much intense action was taking place on the main screen," Ferland says of his experience playing Hideo Kojima's *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*. "Which could often make it feel like I was in a 2D game." The team has thus taken a different approach with *Splinter Cell*; there is no onscreen radar or overhead map demarcating enemies' locations or their individual lines of sight. Instead, a small meter in your heads-up display provides the only real piece of artifice, informing you of just how well hidden the protagonist is from enemy eyes. Throughout the game, it will be crucial to understand how to make use of shadows, walls, and various other forms of cover to veil Fisher's many movements.

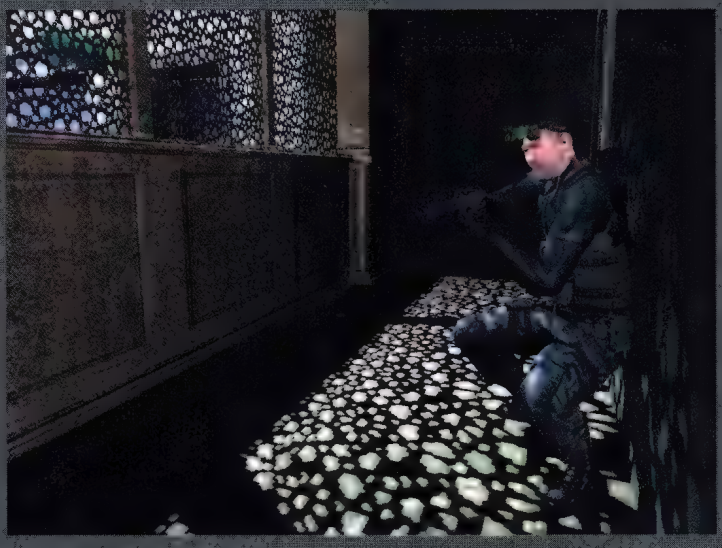
Successfully neutralizing the terrorist threat in your immediate vicinity will only give you nary a moment to relax, as even a closed door will require careful consideration. With no radar to clue you into what awaits on the other side, the question remains: Should you pass through and risk running directly into a roomful of bloodthirsty enemy goons, or perhaps seek an alternate path? In the *Splinter Cell*'s simulated reality, you might instead feed your optical cable under the door in order to get a complete picture of the room's contents before entering, and base your decision on the information garnered. It's precisely this sort of direct, tactile interaction with your environment—and a necessary reliance on stupidly cool technology—that Ubi Soft is depending on to make *Splinter Cell* the immersive, exhilarating experience that it threatens to be.

Ferland continues: "A stealth game is based on having safe zones throughout the levels, which the player can move from one to another in order to avoid the enemy. Our concept with this game was to say, 'What if the player could make his *own* safe zones?' We really wanted to create a world which was fully interactive." Easier said than done, certainly, but what we've seen thus far looks promising. Nearly every light can be shot out, every fallen body can be dragged out of sight, every one of Fisher's footsteps can potentially be heard by a nearby enemy. You must pay close attention to your environment; the lights, your own shadow—any and everything that moves and can be seen.

In addition to the aforementioned optical cable, Fisher is equipped with thermal- and night-vision goggles, several "creative" weapons, and a spy-cam which can be fired onto nearly any surface in the game and used as a fully operational lookout (complete with zoom lens and panning capabilities). To the point: *Splinter Cell* is a far more involved simulation than *Metal Gear Solid 2* ever purported itself to be. It revels in many of Solid Snake's grimy, anti-terrorist, covert military activities, but grants the player a different degree







The development team chose hand-drawn animation over motion-capture.

of freedom (and exercises a different degree of reality within its darkly lit, interactive environs. The AI is far from perfect, but significantly more attuned to your actions than were the guards in Solid 2. This is not a game to be played while doing the dishes or receiving a Swedish massage; nearly every step is a crucial one, and nearly every situation requires the devious touch of a seasoned covert agent.

Powered by a highly modified version of Epic's next-generation Unreal engine, Splinter Cell's graphics were enough to make it a stand-out at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3); especially impressive, considering the level of graphical excellence on display at the show in general. As is becoming a familiar refrain on Xbox, Splinter Cell's graphical emphasis rests firmly upon a consistently realistic portrayal of its decidedly inhospitable international locales. Whereas Solid 2 took a stylized, somewhat manga-inspired approach to its depiction of characters and environments, Splinter Cell's is one of stark realism. Hazy sunlight shines through wall-mounted fans, casting enormous rotating shadows across the inside of a warehouse. Reflections on plastic curtains shimmer as Fisher heads through a morgue, and the curtains themselves sway and smear realistically as he brushes up against them.

And not only does Splinter Cell make prodigious use of Xbox hardware-specific effects such as pixel shaders and environment mapping to achieve these visual set pieces, but textures, polygons—and, ultimately, levels—mesh together with more solidity than nearly any game we've seen on the console thus far (with the one exception of Halo). Small touches—ranging from the fluid pruning masterfully from a fire extinguisher when it catches a stray bullet, to the double-take-inducing filters the game employs for its night vision and thermal goggles effects—all serve to imbue the game with a look quite its own. It is not an exaggeration to say that this may be the single most photorealistic video game we've ever seen. Squint your eyes just a bit and you'll swear you're watching an episode of CNN's Behind the Intifadah.

Splinter Cell is indeed a signal that the second generation of Xbox games is finally on its way. As of this writing, the game is on the verge of going beta, and will then undergo several months of hardcore play testing and balancing before its November release. Its fetishistic attention to weapon detail and military realism will please even the most jaded Guns & Ammo subscriber, while its dazzling technology and remarkable graphical set pieces nearly all scream. Although we don't expect Splinter Cell to revolutionize videogames—or even its genre, necessarily—it may very well become one of the Xbox' must-play titles, if it's able to flesh all of its technical wares within the boundaries of a cohesive story and a solid gameplay experience. Xbox owners should be in for a real treat later this year.

Evan Shamoon

Controls, while nowhere near final, may prove to be the game's only real stumbling block.

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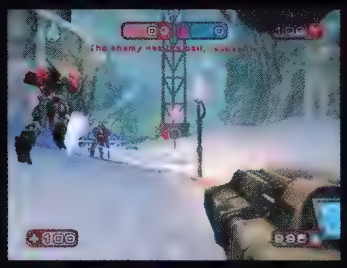
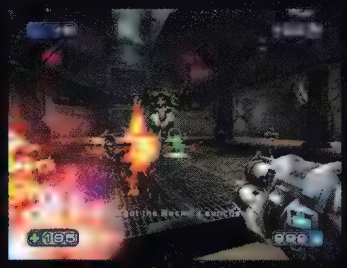

"Game that makes us most excited about Xbox Live!"
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BLINX: THE TIME SWEEPER

Blinx is the cat's meow—and a feline janitor who knows what time it is. He's also the star of the "4D" Xbox platformer *Blinx: The Time Sweeper*.

■ As poet T.S. Eliot said, "There will be time, there will be time." Blinx can use his Time Sweeper device to collect time crystals and manipulate his environment in all manner of cool ways.

Once upon a time, there was Hammer Time, brought to you by talentless, huge-pantaloon-wearing rapper M.C. Hammer. Hammer Time sucked like a Hoover and, though horribly painful to live through, was short-lived and quickly forgotten. Then, it was Miller Time, and that was rather enjoyable provided that you were over the legal drinking age and didn't do anything stupid such as become inebriated and get behind the wheel of a steamroller.

Now, however, it's Blinx the cat's time, courtesy of Microsoft and Japanese game developer Artoon. Together, they're hard at work cobbling up the intriguing platformer *Blinx: The Time Sweeper*, a game both companies grandiosely refer to as the first 4D title the world has ever seen. In this case, the fourth "D" refers directly to time, the valuable commodity that writer Ben Jonson called "that old fellow chronicler"—and the most powerful ally a cat could ever have.

The game's setup, pedestrian at best, may invoke yawns. Toting a powerful "Time Sweeper" vacuum on his back, Blinx (who's essentially a janitor) sets out on a quest to rescue a lovely feline princess from the criminal cat conglomerate The Tom-Tom Gang. Pay the plot no matter—as it's just a coat rack—certainly functional, but hardly noteworthy.) What matters here is the game's unique ability to let its player tinker with time.

Time crystals of different colors and shapes are strewn about the game's 30 or so levels. Collected in the proper combination, these crystals can be used to power Blinx' Time Sweeper. Nabbing three of the same color crystals in a row allows Blinx to access the Sweeper in one of five different ways: record, slow-motion, pause, rewind, and fast-forward. With time properly tamed, Blinx can defeat the toughest foes, reach areas that are seemingly inaccessible, and solve any puzzle thrown at him.

Rushing water? Blinx can rewind time to push his way through the rapidest of rapids, and the graphical effect of static water being parted by our hero's body is perhaps the coolest thing since air conditioning. A destroyed bridge? Time may be rewound so shattered stone reforms itself allowing Blinx to pass. A fearsome monster? Blinx can fast-forward through time so it appears he's running like the Flash on speed while his foe is seemingly stuck in molasses. Or he can slow down time. Or he can pause it altogether. Or record a second version of himself to distract the monster so it can be dispatched with ease. The possibilities here are, possibly, endless.

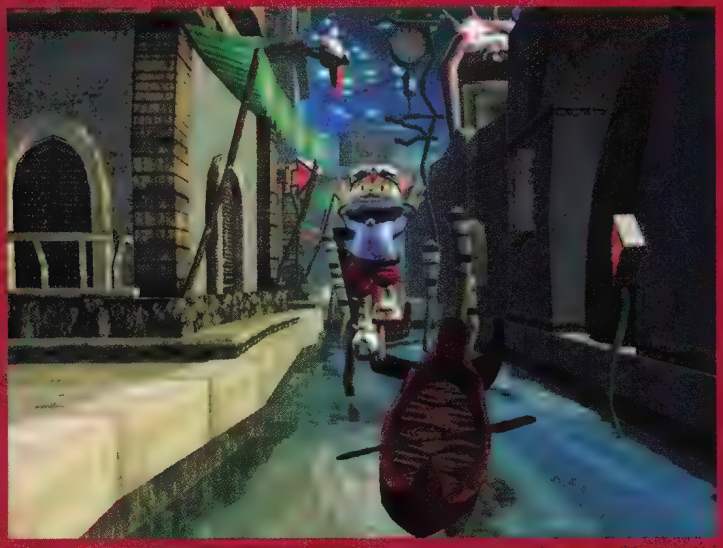
Time can also be Blinx' worst enemy. Monsters, spawned by time glitches, plague the land; Blinx will need to use his Time Sweeper to suck up garbage, and expel it at his enemies, thus killing them and patching the time of time. Even more pressing: each level must be completed within a certain time or it's curtains for a certain cat.

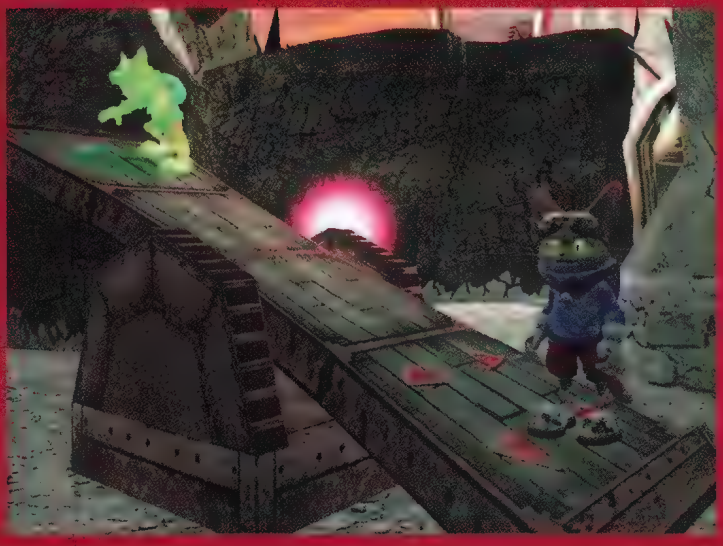
Trash collection and recycling pays off big in *Blinx*. Scooping junk will allow Blinx to sell it for gold that can then be traded in for new and more powerful Time Sweepers. Some, like the TS-3000 will be able to suck in obstacles so large that they block access to secret areas while others will be able to perform such miraculous feats as spitting fire.

Looking to banish the memory of such deadly dull platformers as *Crash Bandicoot*, *Blinx: The Time Sweeper* seems poised to push the Xbox to its limits. "We've leveraged the hard drive to do things that aren't possible on any other console," The game's producer Katsunori Yamaji says. "The design of Blinx, the time control features, the beautiful world with realistic lighting effects, and the amazing water are all features only possible on the Xbox."

It may be easy to dismiss these statements as hyperbolic, but not after seeing the game in motion. Everything's so detailed that it screams to be examined thoroughly, and the Time Sweeper affords players the option to tackle problems in many ways. This freedom, coupled with graphics that are flat-out wonderful, may well propel Blinx far beyond the pack. It certainly seems, even unfinished, to be one hell of a time killer. And this cat, we'd dare say, has some claws.

Greg Orlando





It was the best of times, it was the worst of times ...

All you ever wanted to know about Blinx and his Time Sweeper

It's not easy being a time-sweeping janitor. Thankfully, Blinx will have access to his trusty Time Sweeper vacuum which can be upgraded over the course of *Blinx*. Collect enough junk, and Blinx will even be able to buy the much-feared TS-Fire. This Sweeper will be able to spit flames at the gelatinous Time Monsters as well as members of the hated Tom-Tom Gang.

In addition to his Time Sweeper, the game's producer Katsunori Yamaji says Blinx will have the agility of a feline and can perform backflips and cartwheels to avoid danger. He'll also be able to survive falls from great heights because, as everyone knows, cats always land on their feet.

One thing Blinx will *not* do, however, is use the litter box. "No way, man," Yamaji says. "Litter boxes are for domestic house cats. Blinx is certainly not that. Thankfully, Blinx will also not lick himself (in public)." Thank heaven for small favors.

The Time Sweeper may be the most useful tool in videogames since Mario's hammer, and Katsunori Yamaji, the producer for *Blinx* outlined some of its uses:

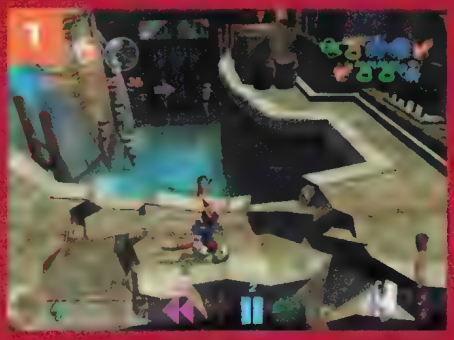
RECORD: Record your actions then play it back while you play as an alternate Blinx. You'll literally have two Blinxes on the screen (one running the pre-recorded route that you played, and the other playing real-time). This comes in handy when you need to take out many enemies or when you have to push to buttons simultaneously to open a door (and the buttons are on opposite sides of the room).

SLOW: Slo-Mo the world around you as you continue to move in real time—needed for when things around you just start happening too fast.

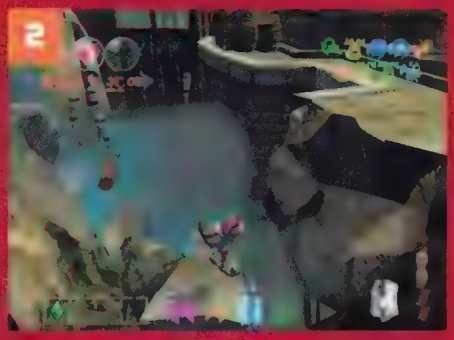
PAUSE: Pause the world around you as you continue to move in real time—deadly traps and surging enemies can be briefly stopped in their tracks.

REWIND: Rewind the world around you as you continue to move in real time—re-open hidden pathways, or let water canals whisk you upstream. Jump on rolling barrels or rocks and they'll take you up to where they came from. (Check out the sequence to the right to see how the rewind feature works.)

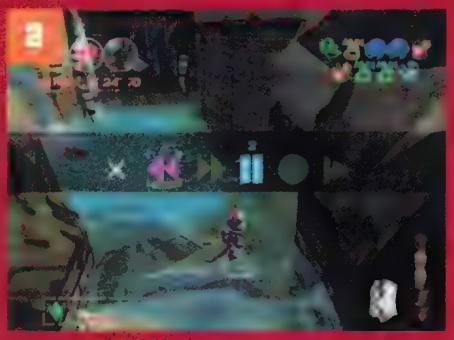
FAST FORWARD: Give Blinx extra speed to cruise past swarming enemies or to make it to the goal in time.



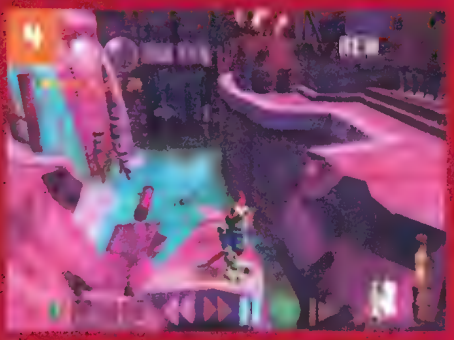
Oh, no! The bridge is collapsing!

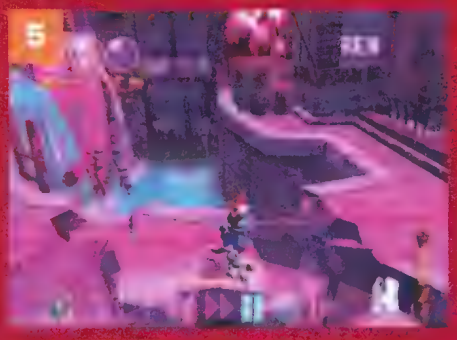


How will Blinx ever manage to cross the bridge?

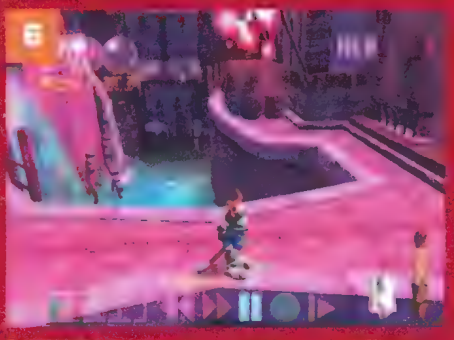


Poor architectural work be damned! Blinx can collect Time Crystals that allow him to go forward into the past. Just like Marty McFly, only different.

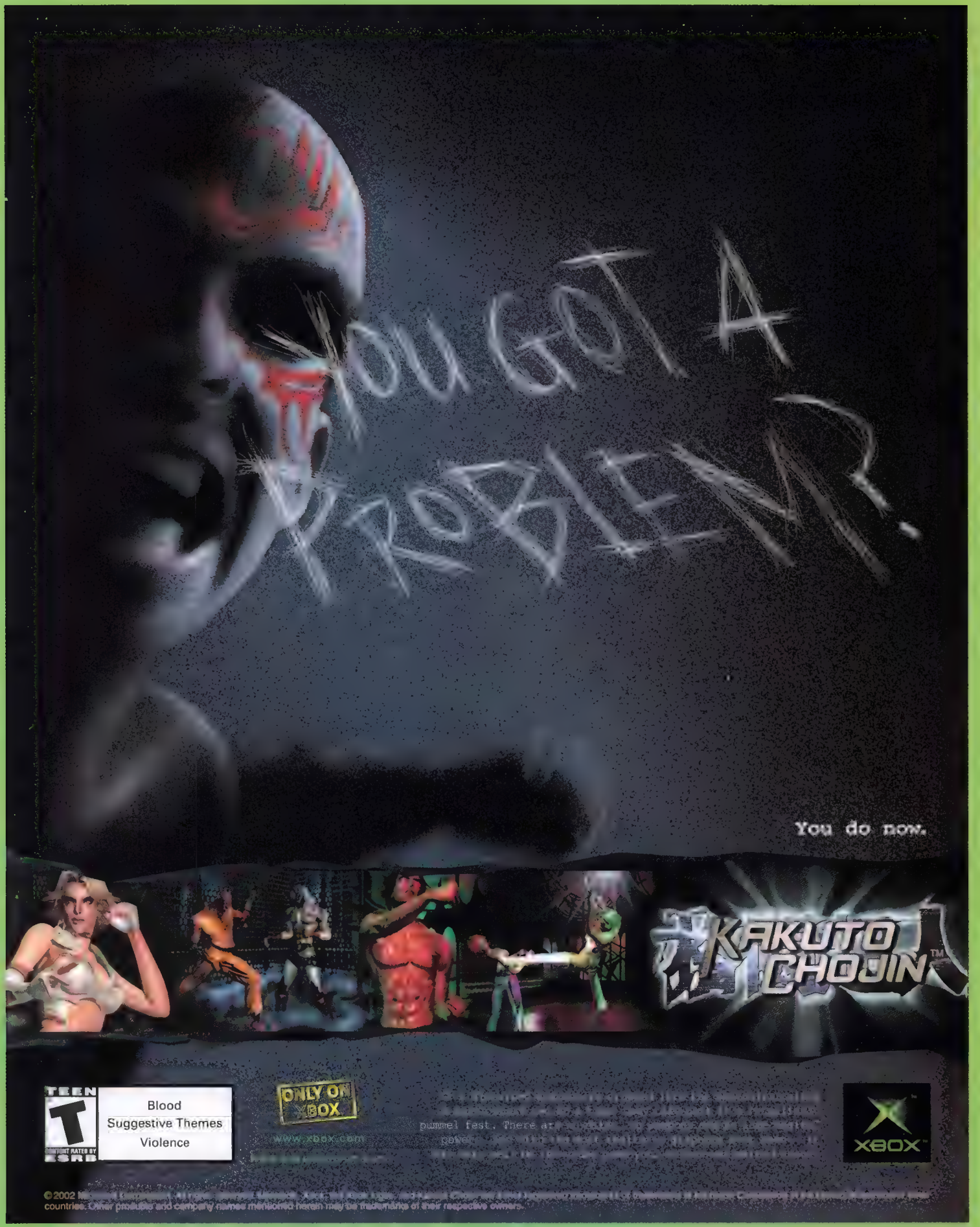




Fun Fact: If we could go back in time, we would punch Adolf Hitler in the stomach and remind ourselves to wear underwear to work today.



With time fully reversed and the bridge repaired, Blinx can go on his merry way.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Closer to Double Fine

Words: Greg Orlando — Photography: Carlo Bacor

Mind, sadly, did not triumph over matter in the case of the poor soul who plummeted through the roof of Tim Schafer's Double Fine Studios. Schafer points wistfully at the ceiling to a freshly cut piece of lumber, indicating where a young woman, down on her luck and apparently up on all the latest pharmaceuticals, took the 25 or so foot plunge to the unyielding concrete below.

Gravity did its nasty work, but things worked out in the end. The woman, thankfully, survived and Schafer, who was working at the time of the accident, tells her sad tale with his face scrunched in bewilderment, as if he's not quite sure what to make of any of it.

Still, when the ancient Chinese curse that damns a man to live in interesting times falls from the sky with the very real possibility of crushing you, there's no where to go but up. You may remember Schafer from such kooky-cool PC titles as *Full Throttle* and *Grim Fandango*. Now, at the helm of Double Fine, he's found a charming (and this is being polite) little converted garage/warehouse in San Francisco, and has turned his focus toward console gaming. His new Xbox exclusive *Psychonauts* made a triumphant stand at May's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) and, frankly, bad luck be damned.

Cars are jammed into the unconverted portion of the building. A 10-foot-tall basketball hoop stands nestled between the cars and the studio's offices. Odd paintings, including one of an elderly woman in a muumuu whose expression suggests she's just watched 136 consecutive episodes of *Saved by the Bell: The College Years* and chased it with a nice glass of warm squid juice, hang on the walls. There are jelly beans on the small circular table in the reception office, rodents in hiding (Schafer freely admits to the problem), a Ping-Pong table around which important meetings are held, and issues of *PC Gamer* resting on a rack in the rather fetid-smelling bathroom. Schafer points to a small room where some people have gathered for a brainstorming session; in a place festooned with artwork, this room is bare save for a picture of dogs. "You can tell they live entirely in the world of the mind," he says of his employees.

To the point, and with no further shilly-shallying around the issue—the place is mostly a reclaimed dump. But that does not mean there isn't magic among the mold.

This is the house that Tim built. It's where love, dedication, and skill will combine to ensure that this time mind will indeed triumph over matter.

This is where they make *Psychonauts*. This is where lead programmer Dave Dixon codes in to the Xbox equal parts goodness and wonder. This is where art director Scott Campbell sketches out lumpy lungfish and Napoleon Bonaparte in a style that's reminiscent of the stuff seen in a Bizarro World graphic novel. This is where a young circus boy named Raz will, ultimately, become the greatest Psychonaut the Xbox has ever seen...

■ Fun Fact: No telepaths were hurt in the writing of this story.

■ A mind is a terrible thing to waste and Raz will need to use every ounce of his skill to restore the cerebrums of his young friends. Along the way, he'll need to rescue his pretty girlfriend Lilly from a lumpy lungfish monster (top) and enter the brains of many strange and wonderful characters.

This is the id speaking: Tim Schafer's *Psychonauts* may well rock like a paper boat on the high seas. Its premise, Sigmund Freud meets the platform game, lifts its leg on the notion of the same old same old, and spritzes liberally. The graphics here are hot like a Samoan sauna, cool like a Norwegian's refrigerator. Its young hero Raz, at once hydrocephalic and cheery, serves to remind us of the magical childhood we had (or should have had) before adulthood crushed our sense of whimsy flatter than Wile E. Coyote after a date with the plummeting boulder. The gameplay, which has Raz entering people's brains to see what makes them tick, may well march this parade straight down Classic Street ...

Psychonauts has already walked away with the prize for best original game at E3 2002, and the awarding judge had this to say about its creator: "Tim Schafer is a man so creative that we're almost inclined to kick him out of the gaming industry. Why? The bottom line is that he makes everyone else's games look so damn derivative."

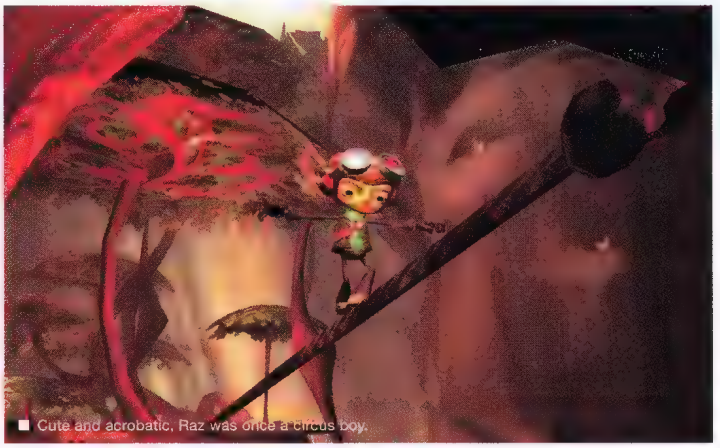
This is the ego speaking: "People don't put up with any crap on the console, which is a good lesson for adventure game makers," Schafer says. It may be that Schafer and his team, in their attempt to create a series of environments that take place inside various characters' cerebrums, have created an experience that's perhaps too weird and/or confusing for a mass audience. Make no mistake about it, *Psychonauts* does not look like your average videogame. Its characters, from Raz' trainers Mia and Sasha to Napoleon Bonaparte himself, all appear slightly deranged, like something out of an Edward Gorey painting. Simply, are people who've been bred on shiny, happy Mario titles up for a game that blends

People don't **put up with any crap on the console**, which is a good lesson for adventure game makers ...

■ Excelsior! Raz must use his brawn as well as his brain to accomplish missions.

■ Fire! The ability to start fires with the mind is called pyrokinesis.

■ Raz can access his powers through an interface that [illegible] through double.



■ Cute and acrobatic, Raz was once a circus boy.

the off-kilter look and feel of a Tim Burton film with straightforward platforming sensibilities?

This is the superego speaking: Try not. Do, or do not. There is no try.

Schafer has just implemented *Psychonauts*' special "pause feature," which is to say the early version of the game he's showing has crashed like the stock for The Victorian Nickel-Plated Velocipede Company on Black Tuesday. He laughs heartily at this misfortune, puts the Xbox controller he was holding down and reaches for a jellybean. As he talks, he'll bite two different colored beans in half and then smoosh the uneaten halves together. It's oddly endearing, this jellybean sandwich making he does.

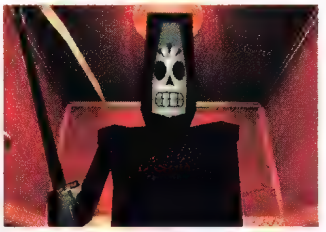
Matters of the mind occupy Schafer's thoughts on this day. While forthcoming, he's certainly aware of what he should and shouldn't say. He doesn't want to give away too many of *Psychonauts*' secrets, even though he's already plowed through a mountain of concept art and character sketches tacked to the walls, describing most of it in detail. Witness, for example, the conspiracy theory guy. "You go into his mind and everything is arranged around him like a web," Schafer says. "Everything is about him, and everywhere he foes he's being followed by these planes and low talkers and stuff. And," he adds, "the Girl Scouts are part of the conspiracy."

Or take the case of the lumpy lungfish who's kidnapped Raz' girlfriend Lilly: "You go chasing [the lungfish] into the water, and you're deathly afraid of drowning. You sink down to the bottom of the lake and find there's a secret world down there. All the waters have been levitated off the bottom of the lake. There's this whole underground world where the lungfish lives—and you go in his mind. In his mind, it's totally normal ..." Needless to say, the secret of the lungfish will not be revealed today—but understand that reality, at least in the case of *Psychonauts*, is purely subjective. "There's a whole city full of little lungfish citizens walking around," Schafer says, "with little lungfish cops, lungfish moms pushing lungfish babies in little strollers and you're this ..." Well, a little boy in a monster's mind is not exactly a welcome thing, and Raz'

Tim Timeline ...

Tim Woods, aka Mr. Wrestling, never made a titanic triumvirate of PC titles. Tim Schafer, formerly of LucasArts, has. Our pick for the steel cage match? Woods.

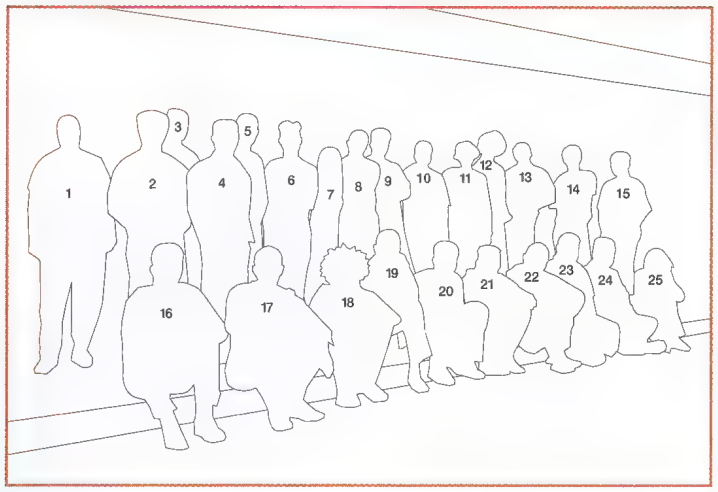
Psychonauts marks Tim Schafer's console game debut. Pre-Raz, Schafer worked on such PC games as *Grim Fandango* (1998), *Full Throttle* (1995), and Day of the Tentacle (1993) for LucasArts. *Fandango*, of course, is considered Schafer's magnum opus; it's a bizarre 3D adventure wherein players take the role of Manny Calavera, who's a travel agent for the dead—at a time when things are truly rotten in the state of decomposition ...



Grim Fandango
Pub: LucasArts 1998 **Dev:** LucasArts
Platform: PC

Full Throttle
Pub: LucasArts 1995 **Dev:** LucasArts
Platform: PC

Day of the Tentacle
Pub: LucasArts 1993 **Dev:** LucasArts
Platform: PC



1.Erik Robson: Level Designer **2.Steve Chen:** Lead Level Designer **3.Wilson Hom:** Programmer
4.Joe Ching: Level Designer **5.David Coathupe:** Programmer **6.David Dixon:** Lead Programmer
7.Misook Lee: Artist **8.Brian Christian:** Artist **9.David Russell:** Character Artist
10.Tim Schafer: President **11.Camilla Fossen:** Associate Producer **12.Chris Schultz:** Animator
13.Scott Campbell: Art Director **14.Eric Ingerson:** Animator **15.Paul Zinnes:** Lead Artist
16.Mark Hamer: Artist **17.Kim Cogan:** Artist **18.Chris McGee:** Level Designer
19.Gaurav Mathur: Level Designer **20.Nathan Stapley:** Artist **21.Raymond Crook:** Character Artist
22.Josh Lindeman: Artist **23.Geoff Soulis:** Artist **24.Rhandy Cruz:** Artist **25.Lydia Lu:** Artist
Not pictured: **Sandra Christensen:** Animation Dept. Supervisor **Paul Du Bois:** Programmer
Jon Stone: Programmer **Lance Burton:** Programmer **Kjeld Pedersen:** Artist

Tim Schafer is **a man so creative** that we're almost inclined to kick him out of the gaming industry.

appearance in this stage reflects this.

Then, there's the washed-up actress who's often of two minds on the singular subject of her mental health. To swipe liberally from the bard, all the world's a stage for this woman. "That's what the game means to me," Schafer says. "You meet a character in the real world and they have a personality. Then you go into their head and you see that personality thing embodied in this huge, changing world. The whole entire level represents the mental state of the character. So this whole stage flips from sunny to dark as per [the woman's] moods. And you jump out of the mind and you see that character; you totally know what's going on in their head. It's a much deeper character development than most. Hopefully."

On a more concrete level, Raz will be able to interact with more than 40 different characters, although he won't be able to enter every single mind he meets. Schafer, who calls *Psychonauts* "massively singleplayer" plans to pack the game with 12-16 different levels, including a cool sort of psychic summer camp, where young and seemingly lobotomized Psychonauts-in-training will go to mindlessly stare at the idiot box known as television or aimlessly play Hacky Sack.

Our young hero will be able to access various mental powers such as levitation, a psi-blast, telekinesis, invisibility, and pyrokinesis on his quest to rescue his friends' brains and become a full-fledged Psychonaut. As he masters his craft, he'll win psychic merit badges—and plow through some of the most graphically zesty environments the Xbox has seen. Just staring at the opening sequence wherein Raz tries to probe the mind of a squirrel amid a gorgeous pastoral setting is enough to make us mindful of the following date: spring 2003. That's when we'll likely be supergluing *Psychonauts* into our Xboxes. ■

Specialist. **Rafael Sampayo.** Electronic Warfare Specialist/Linguist. **AN ARMY Of ONE.**® The United States Army.

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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
BLOOD
STRONG LANGUAGE
VIOLENCE
XBOX
ONLY ON XBOX
BLACK LABEL GAMES

shadows aren't places to hide, but places to fear. race fierce, brute force combat as the noble knight, evil bombardier or any one of 12 other characters, each wielding a devastating range of barbaric, medieval style weapons. and with over 25 intensely graphic, suspenseful realms, just making it around the next corner doesn't guarantee you'll make it a step further.

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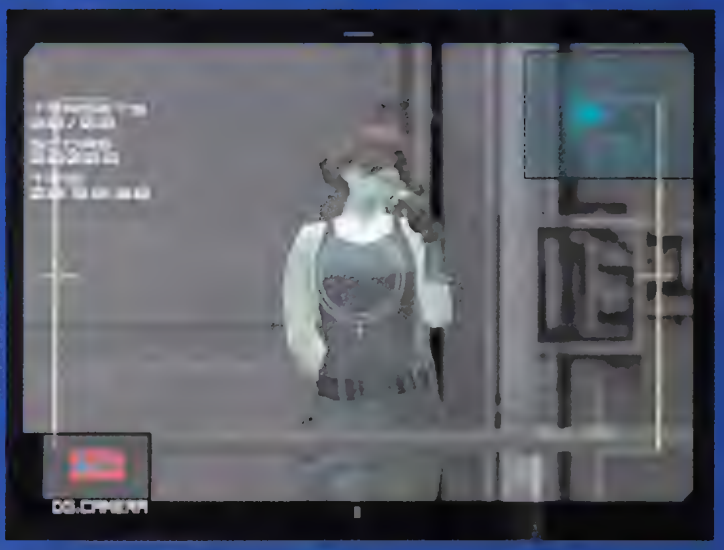


■ Spread out, men. We're looking for escaped textures.

METAL GEAR SOLID 2 SUBSTANCE

Konami brings the Snake to Microsoft's Xbox for an expanded version of *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*. This time, it's all about Substance ...

"Substance—the real thing." That's how legendary game designer Hideo Kojima explains the title of his newest baby, *Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance*, an update of last year's PlayStation 2 smash hit *Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty*. After much speculation as to whether the game would ever make it onto Xbox, Konami plans to release the game for Microsoft's behemoth console in November.

While *Sons of Liberty* was a towering achievement, meshing cinematic cut scenes with the stealth-oriented gameplay that has become the Metal Gear franchise's trademark element, Kojima wasn't satisfied.

"There was a big decision to be made," he explains. "We asked ourselves, 'Are there things we can do with *Sons of Liberty* that we didn't?' There are, and so we did *Substance*." Thanks to relaxed time constraints and a healthy re-examining of the Metal Gear game mechanics, Kojima's team retooled *Sons of Liberty* into *Substance* to form what is essentially a director's cut of the original game.

"It was a time issue," he explains. "Ideally, [*Metal Gear Solid 2*] released last year would have included VR and Alternative Missions, but there was no way we could have released the game in November 2001 with all these extra stages. Now that we have had the time, we are able to include all these extra features."

Substance promises some 200 VR Missions and 100 Alternative Missions, all in addition to the original *Sons of Liberty* game. According to Kojima, "The VR stages are similar to those in *MGS: VR Missions* for the PSOne, but they will look much greater." And when Kojima says they'll look greater, he isn't kidding. Gone are the simple vector-style graphics found on the PlayStation, replaced with a fuller, more-detailed graphical style. What's more, the VR Missions will offer unlockable items and secrets as an incentive to work through them.

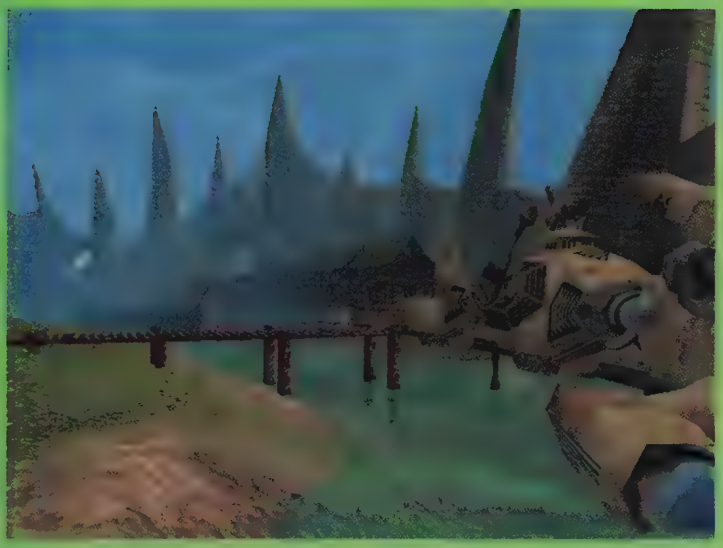
Equally intriguing are the Alternative Missions, which will revisit a pair of familiar locales. "They are mini-missions that utilize the environments in *Sons of Liberty*—the tanker and the plant," Kojima says. In addition, it will be possible to use different characters in these new stages, including Ninja as well as Snake in a tux or his old *Metal Gear Solid* duds.

And if that's not enough Snake for you, there are five new Snake Tales, which will supposedly feature the return of Snake's gal pal Meryl Silverburgh. "The Snake Tales stages will be totally new short stories with Snake being the main character," Kojima explains.

Substance will also include some extras previously exclusive to Europe. "The U.S. version will come with the Boss Survival Mode, Casting Theater Mode, and European Extreme difficulty levels for *Sons of Liberty*, all of which were available in the European release of the original game," Kojima says.

However, *Substance*'s centerpiece is still the *Sons of Liberty* adventure, which will appear in its original state. And contrary to some published reports, there won't be an option to play through the whole episode as Snake. "This is a misunderstanding," Kojima says when questioned about Snake's rumored reappearance. "We are not changing *Sons of Liberty* at all. You don't get to play the entire Plant Chapter with Snake." Oddly enough Konami representatives claim that Snake will be playable in the Plant Chapter—after a fashion. A simple palette swap (with no real changes to gameplay or its mechanics) may enable players to play through this level as Snake.

While that tidbit may disappoint some fans, Kojima finally seems content with his creation, perhaps because of a departure from the often-criticized focus on story and cinematic sequences found in *Sons of Liberty*. "[*Sons of Liberty*] is a story-oriented game," Kojima explains. "Because of the story, there are limitations inherent–in *Substance*, we can take some of those away. Now that this game comes with the story-oriented *Liberty*, gameplay-oriented VR/Alternative Missions, Snake Tales, and the extra Boss Survival and Casting Theater modes, *Metal Gear Solid 2* becomes its true self. With all components, *Metal Gear Solid 2* sheds its skin and reveals substance."



HAVEN
CALL OF THE KING

After years of making other people's games, U.K. development house Traveller's Tales is close to completing its first home-grown project.

Between running up bar tabs that could bankrupt a small country and bending corners to the Darth Vader-like will of the lead artist's new BMW M3, *Xbox Nation* was surprised to learn that *Haven, Call of the King*, could be a contender. Surprised because U.K.-based developer Traveller's Tales has made a middling reputation churning out other people's games in double-quick time. Sega's *Sonic R*, Universal's *Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex*, and the slightly alarming *Toy Story 2 Racer* all spring unfortunately to mind. But *Haven* is going to be different. It's going to be good.

Or at least, that's the plan, as evidenced by a presentation *Xbox Nation* received in the bucolic surroundings of Traveller's Tales U.K. headquarters, just outside Manchester, England. As the game's producer, Arthur Parsons, dashed enthusiastically through the levels, it became clear that *Haven* is not one game, but many. It's a truly epic tale, armed with an engine that is as comfortable with *Crash Bandicoot*-style platform antics as interstellar flight, cart racing, and the odd bit of tomb-raiding. In fact, if you take all the 3D games Traveller's Tales has made in the past and stuffed them into a blender, *Haven*—or something like it, would be the result, at least mechanically.

It's a game that creator, Jon Burton, has been wanting to make for at least six years, but the financial pressures of running a studio and the lack of polygon-pushing power in the PlayStation generation of consoles kept the project in dry dock.

Parsons says, "The original intention with *Haven* was to create a completely seamless world that allows players the freedom to move from area to area on a planet and then into space and to another planet with no interruptions, making the playing of the game a truly next-gen title. So the advent of the next generation of consoles meant that we could begin working on it, as the technology had finally caught up with the premise of the game."

Haven, the game's crimson-haired hero, has what is perhaps the most expansive game world ever created to wander about in. He can explore the islands and fortresses of a planet, then hop in a rocket and fly off into space unimpeded. Once he's up there, he can point his ship at the next not-too-distant planet and fly over there, across the surface and land, before casually hopping back out and getting sucked into some more adventuring. There's no loading, no cut scenes to sit through, and no artificial barriers to block a player's progress.

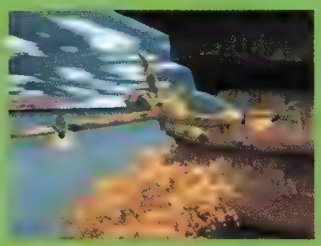
The gameplay itself, though early in terms of AI, is just as varied. It incorporates hand-to-hand combat, driving any vehicle that moves, and planning assaults on faraway towers and seemingly unreachable outcrops of land—all to find the magical bell that will release the icy grip of the evil Lord Vetch on your land of naturally peace-loving proletariat pals.

"The gameplay in *Haven* is intended to appeal to everyone," Parsons explains. "There are so many different gaming styles—we want everyone to sit and play the game through and be completely taken with the whole experience. It won't be until they finish the game and sit back and get a well deserved break that they will realize that they have blasted across a lake in a speedboat, flown across the sea in a biplane, crash landed and run from a cave collapse, used a jetpack to battle against a fire dragon, destroyed a space station, blasted into warp drive."

But what about the nagging doubts that Traveller's Tales previous games can't help but feed? Parsons is undaunted.

"For far too long we have had titles out that have been good solid games that are bang-on time for their scheduled release. However, when you are turning out a big license in under a year there are always areas that you, as a developer, feel could have been done a little better. So *Haven* is a big challenge—it's us as a development studio coming out and saying, 'Right...here it is, if we get the time we want and can do things our way, this is what we can produce.'"

Simon Cox



■ Hero Haven will have access to all manner of ground- and space-based craft, but will he ever master the figure-four leglock?

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Peter's Friends

Words: Simon Cox - Photography: Martin Thompson

How Peter Molyneux is building Lionhead into the games company of the future.

It is 10:40 on a damp, cold evening somewhere in United Kingdom, and it has just dawned on you that the last 10 minutes trudging through a pitch-black wood with several slightly inebriated members of Lionhead Studios has all been leading up to this: a collapsed bridge over a dark river. You'd think twice about balancing on the few remaining beams if it were dry and in broad daylight, and if you were completely sober. As it is, it's pitch black, freezing cold, and the steel girder that constitutes the only viable route is a mere six inches wide. And you're a little drunk. The only person smiling at the prospect of this challenge is Peter Molyneux. He's positively beaming. But then this was his plan all along. He knew we'd come to this impasse because it's at the bottom of his sprawling garden. He knew we'd peer doubtfully between the remains of the bridge into the water below, where a jagged bit of metal, and old bicycle, and what could pass for barbed wire, would leer menacingly up at us. And he knew that the pub beyond would close at 11:00 p.m., and that going around the obstacle would take too long. The mild-mannered, always welcoming Molyneux has transformed into a different creature. He's the devil's advocate, and he's prodding you, testing you, making you play his game. You really don't want to fall into that freezing water, impaled on that jagged piece of metal. You just want a pint of beer. Well, if you want it, you're going to have to cross the river…

Peter Molyneux loves games. He has a room in his house filled with every board game every made, with very few exceptions. They come in all shapes and sizes and hail from all four corners of the Earth. It's a passion that has taken a self-proclaimed geek from a tiny studio above a Hi-Fi shop to multi-millionaire status as one of the most influential game designers in the world, and a company that now—indirectly—boasts over 125 employees. Almost all of them are directly responsible for making the next generation of videogames, including the magnificent-looking *Fable* (formerly *Project Ego*). Incredibly, they are all happy, thanks to a corporate culture that's, well, not corporate. It's a culture that fosters creativity and innovation and values ideas above all else and it is thriving under the pioneering satellites scheme which gives each Lionhead project its own independent studio. *Xbox Nation* traveled to Guildford, England, to profile the satellites and to discover how Molyneux is building the games company of the future.

Small is beautiful

"If you've got a game company, it grows. It just does. It can't help it," Molyneux says, between sips of coffee. "If you're not growing, then you're dying." And Lionhead is certainly growing. Looking around the offices, there are at least 70 people there, split between two—and soon to be three—projects. But growing has its own problems, and they can be fatal. Molyneux's previous company, the award-winning Bullfrog Productions, became so big after he sold it to EA that it began to fall apart. Internecine squabbles and the pressure of 200 people all competing for resources was just too much. After months of soul-searching, Molyneux left the company he'd founded to start Lionhead (named, comically, after Director Mark Webley's now-deceased hamster) with a new plan that reads like a Zen riddle: to create something that could expand without really expanding. At the same time, Simon and Dean Carter, who has worked with Molyneux on *Dungeon Keeper*, had also left Bullfrog and EA and were looking to start their own studio, Big Blue Box.

That's when Molyneux came up with the idea for a satellites system. Lionhead, he figured, as well as making its own games, would become an umbrella company, shielding the fledgling developers from the hassles of securing funding and dealing with the money men at the big publishers. This would allow Lionhead to grow, without becoming a giant corporation. Molyneux—and Lionhead (the company, not the hamster)—would become a sort of super-agent; working to find the best deals for the satellites, taking meetings with publishers, touting the games at trade shows, and helping to shield the teams from the necessary hardships of funding a videogame.

Big Blue Box officially signed on in 1998, and was swiftly followed by more ex-Bullfroggers, Intrepid. For Molyneux is was the perfect set up.

"It's was absolutely ideal," he recalls, "because they understood the way we worked, and we trusted them and they trusted us. It allowed us to continue to expand without killing the culture. That word, culture, is very important. Making a game is all about it getting completely under your skin, and that's very hard to do when you're part of a big corporation. It's much easier to do if you feel like you're part of smaller company."

He should know. In order to finish *Dungeon Keeper* for EA, he moved his small team out of the Bullfrog campus and into a room in his house. Big Blue Box directors, Simon and Dean Carter, were with him. It worked wonders, but it's in direct opposition to the prevailing wisdom of the games business, which sees cost-cutting as far outweighing the creative benefits.

"If you sit down with a financial bloke," says Molyneux," he'll say, 'This is crazy! You're paying thousands of pounds a year more than you need to—what you should do is bring them all together in one big office.' But I think keeping it separate is very important."

The system isn't just for external

"If you're not growing, then you're dying." Molyneux

Big Blue Box

Founded: 1998 **Directors:** Dean and Simon Carter **Team size:** 24 **Current project:** *Fable* (*Project Ego*) **Due:** 2003

Don't worry; you don't actually play as a kid, but kill his father and you'll have to watch him weep.

One version of your fully customizable hero stands aloft a fresh kill. The graphics engine is simply stunning.

And another version. Note the face detail, which will yield the most expressive features yet seen in a game.

With *Halo* still the only killer-app for the Xbox, Big Blue Box finds itself thrust into the limelight. Simon and Dean Carter's startup is celebrating its fourth anniversary and not at all daunted by the fact that its first game, *Fable* (as it might be called by the time you read this), formerly *Project Ego*, is nowhere near being finished.

"The best thing about working with Peter [Molyneux]," explains Dean, "is that I've never ever come across a businessman. He always, always puts the game first, no matter who he thinks might scream at him. You know, he had EA shareholders screaming at him to complete *Dungeon Keeper*, but his attitude was always, 'Is the game good enough that I can hold my head up come reviews time, or when I'm interviewed about it?'"

Big Blue Box was the first company to participate in the satellite scheme, whereby they have all the autonomy of an independent studio, while reaping the benefits of Lionhead's financial, testing, and music departments. And of course, having Molyneux around to kick in the odd idea doesn't hurt either.

Fable may be a ways off, but the updated version we saw at Big Blue Box during our visit looked simply stunning. For the uninitiated, Fable will be (according to Molyneux) "The greatest role-playing game ever made." Complete freedom within the world, some incredible AI and an open-ended plot all conspire to make good that promise. But it's the graphics that have garnered the most attention so far. In one scene that we were shown, a rippling, moonlit pool was approached warily by werewolf-type creatures, complete with the now standard and fabulously rendered hair and bump mapping. Surrounding the pool was a forest, with each branch of each tree casting its own spooky shadows. The effect was certainly reminiscent of a dark fairy tale, and wouldn't look out of place in *The Dark Crystal* (with a few less Muppets, of course).

Damian Buzugbe is one the artists on *Fable*. He previously worked at Acclaim Studios in London, but he's much happier here. "It's very different to the places I worked before," he says. " For a start, the set up is young and the people who run this studio are actually interested in making games, which makes a huge difference to me."

studios, either. After spending years working on the core technologies for its PC hit, *Black and White*, Lionhead has recently spun off one of its internal teams into its own satellite, Black and White Studios. Located just a few hundred yards down the road, the studio is under the supervision of another ex-Bullfrog employee, Jonty Barnes, and working on *Black and White 2* (PC) and *Black and White Next Generation* (Xbox, PlayStation 2). By the time you read this, another satellite will have been born, as the internal team developing the PC game, *The Movies*, is soon to get its own studio, too.

It's good to talk

Keeping things separate may be important, but communication is just as vital to the health of the satellites. Built into the system are plenty of opportunities for cross-pollination of ideas and mutual support, as well as centralized testing and music departments (again, something that a small developer would find prohibitively expensive without the Lionhead umbrella). There are weekly meetings where teams present the latest build of their games, and on the day that *Xbox Nation* visited *Black and White* Studios, the employees were working diligently on water effects that they would soon be sharing the secrets of with *B.C.* satellite, Intrepid. For Barnes, the studio head at Black and White, it's crucial to the distinctive culture.

"It pushes you. If we see something cool in another satellite's game while it's in testing, then we can actually ask them, and say, 'How did you do that?' and they tell us. I will happily give all the source code for whatever we're doing to Simon at Big Blue Box, and say, 'Here you go, mate, have a look,' and he'll do the same for me."

That centralized testing facility at Lionhead is the beating heart of the satellite system. It's where the teams get crucial feedback on their games throughout development, and unlike many companies, they have enough time and support to make the necessary changes.

"There really is no ego here," Simon Carter says, delivering an unintentional pun. "If someone in the testing department says, 'Actually, this is shit,' instead of getting all defensive and blaming them for not understanding our system, we say, 'Bugger! Why didn't we see that sooner?' And then we fix it." Molyneux himself often spends hours chatting to the testers about what they think of the game, absorbing every bit of their feedback, and working with the teams to find solutions to any design problems that crop up.

"We also have these things called roundtables, where we get all the programmers from Lionhead and the satellites, or all the artists, to sit together and share what's going on every few weeks," he says. " It's a creative sharing, where everybody says, 'We're trying this, maybe you should try it.'"

The Movies' Adrian Moore puts it in perspective: " I don't want to slag off other companies that I've worked for, but there are places where there's a lot of cynicism. But here, everyone is encouraging you. You don't feel that you're talking to enemies or competitors, but rather friends, and you can tell them everything about the game."

This kind of transparency is not confined to the development process. Every Friday, Molyneux, along with Webley, gets up in front of everyone at Lionhead to reveal everything he can—from the current bank balance to the type of coffee in the kitchen. Any of the Lionhead employees, including the satellites, can look at the Lionhead accounts any time they want. Molyneux maintains that Lionhead belongs to its employees and that they have a right to know everything that goes on, because, he believes, it's their business as much as it is his.

But maintaining that culture

Russell Shaw (Sound)

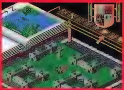
Adrian Moore (Project Lead)

Mark Webley (Director)

Peter's Games

Before Lionhead, Molyneux had a string of hits with Bullfrog

Molyneux's first games company, Bullfrog Productions, was hugely successful during [illegible]



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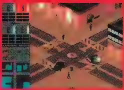

Syndicate (1993)

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Intrepid

Founded: 1998 **Directors:** Matt Chiltern and Joe Rider **Team size:** 22 **Current Project:** *B.C.* **Due:** 2003

Ben Cousins, Intrepid's lead designer, has an Nintendo 64 running on his desk and *Super Mario 64* is permanently on. Ask him what Shigeru Miyamoto's platforming plumber has to do with a game set in a prehistoric world, and he'll tell you without batting an eyelid.

"You have to be incredibly analytical as a game designer," he says. "When I play now I often have a stopwatch in my hand, timing how long it takes Mario to travel a certain distance, how long he's in the air when jumping, how high he jumps. It's really useful to try to understand it, not copy, but apply some of the same approaches."

Set in an imaginary time, where humans share the world with all manner of dinosaurs, and a race of apes, *B.C.* casts you as the leader of a tribe making its way to higher ground. The journey is the destination here, and that's where Cousins' Mario-autopsy comes in handy. Though you have specific tasks to complete, such as feeding and clothing your tribe, protecting them from the odd Tyrannosaurus Rex or band of raptors, how you complete them is up to you. Intrepid gives you an environment, populates it with flora and fauna and then lets you loose. The game is third-person, and you will be able to hop in and out of different tribe members (not nearly as disgusting as it sounds) and discover tools and weapons as you go. Peter Molyneux is on record as saying that *B.C.* will be "the bloodiest, goriest game ever made." Just like Mario, then.

Everything in the environment of *B.C.* can be pushed, pulled, broken or manipulated. Crushing dinosaurs is just one option.

The hero? Your main character is the tribe leader, but you can switch control to other tribe members on the fly.

More Raquel Welch than cavewoman, but a great example of Intrepid's character detail and shading. Seriously.

As with all these screens, this is—incredibly— in-game. This T-Rex is incredibly complex, and will terrorize your tribe.

Black & White

Founded: 2000 **Studio head:** Jonty Barnes **Team size:** 24 **Current Projects:** *B&W 2* (PC), *B&W Next Generation* (Xbox and PS2) **Due:** 2003

To date, Lionhead's PC debut *Black and White* has sold more than two million units. After years of researching the AI technology needed to power it, Peter Molyneux has given trusted team leader Jonty Barnes his own studio. Accordingly, Black and White Studios is the first satellite to come from within the company.

The outfit is currently working on two projects; *Black and White Next Generation* for Xbox and PlayStation 2 and *Black and White 2* for PC. One of its functions is the extension of Lionhead brands, and it's something Molyneux is keen for Big Blue Box to emulate; spawning its own satellite system to make sequels to *Fable* while the core team gets on with exploring original titles.

Black and White Next Generation is Barnes' first Xbox project. Set once again in the mythical land of Eden, the game casts you as a god, but this time with much more direct control over your physical manifestation: your creature. Like Molyneux's first hit, *Populous* (see sidebar), your strength and energy comes from the number of followers you can attract. You'll be battling rival gods, and their creatures as you roam the expansive world in search of new devotees. The goal? To become the sole ruler of Eden.

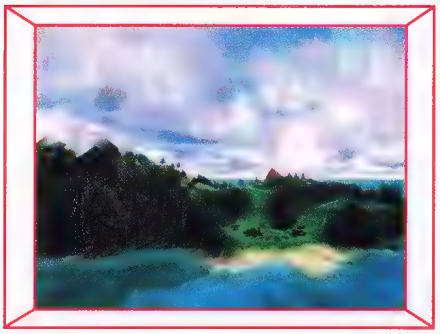
Of course, as with *Black and White*, you can be as good or as evil as you like, using your giant creature to help your people, or to terrorize them. But don't think that because it's a sequel, that it's going to be rushed out.

"*Black and White Next Generation* is a completely original experience," explains Barnes. "Even though it's a sequel of sorts. Yes, we've got the creatures, the nice landscaped worlds, and the moral choices, and that's something that will continue throughout all the *Black and White* games. But there's just so much research in getting a game right. I remember Peter saying, during the making of *Dungeon Keeper*, that the only way to get a game just right is to play it literally hundreds and hundreds of times."

Having said that, the version that *Xbox Nation* viewed at Black and White Studios, looked impressive, and the Xbox version in particular will boast some incredible effects, thanks to programmers such as Thomas Rolfes, who demonstrated unbelievable ocean water graphics that looked lifted right out of *The Perfect Storm*. Ask him what makes the satellite system so attractive to software developers, and he nails it.

"The willingness to question everything and the ability to change direction if needed is a huge factor," he states. "There's also genuine interest from every employee in the game, and also from management—and excellent communication. Top-down communication is anti-creative. How many game developers are out there, the size of Lionhead, where the directors invite the teams and any interested employee into their homes in order to discuss games?"

In line with console play styles, *Black and White Next Generation* will give you more direct control of your creature.



The landscapes already look stunning, even at a reasonably early stage, thanks to constant graphics research.

isn't easy, particularly when bringing in new hires. Most companies rely on management to make the hiring decisions. But for Lionhead, that's where the process begins, not ends.

"When I joined Bullfrog in 1992, I think there were about 12 people working there, and Peter insisted that at least 10 of them interview me," recalls Webley, "and some of them didn't really know why they were having to do that, and there was sort of an awkward silence, but it's a sound idea because with such a small environment, one person could completely ruin it. The people and the culture and the openness are the most important things here."

It's finished when it's finished

Ask any games journalist in the United Kingdom when they think *Fable* will be ready, and they'll probably laugh. Molyneux's projects have a habit of taking years longer than most people expect, but confront the man himself about his reputation for late arrivals, and you get a typically Molyneux reply.

"I've never actually been late with a game," he says. His logic is flawless; he's never been late because he never gives a finish date to a publisher. Only a few developers in the world do this (*Doom*'s id Software is famously one) and the result is a lifting of the pressure to rush a project—crucial, Molyneux believes, to making great games. It was the first thing Microsoft asked about when it signed the then *Project Ego* title." They asked me," he says, "'When will the game be finished?' and I said, 'I don't know…and if any of your developers do really know, then they're probably making a sequel, or they're making something that's shit."

So how different would *Fable* be if Big Blue Box were not a Lionhead satellite? Dean Carter is in no doubt of the importance of having the freedom to make the game their way, and on their schedule.

"It wouldn't have been made in the first place. And if it was made, it would be out right now, and you'd be playing it, but the publisher would have said, 'Forget about a cool sword combat mode—make it really bloody and make it linear.' It would be on the shelves to meet somebody's quarterly results, for better or for worse."

Without Lionhead there wouldn't be any satellites, no *Fable*. Nor would we have stared, open-mouthed at the incredible graphics of *B.C.* at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3). Those developers, Big Blue Box and Intrepid respectively, would be making different games. Games designed to keep them afloat. Games that publishers like third-party developers to make for them, such as sequels, ports and clones.

"It's a family culture," concludes Moore. "It's a cliché to say that, but it's really what we have here. Everyone's just really passionate about making games. There's no hierarchy with someone looking down upon you, issuing demands. It's more a case of everyone asking, 'Well, how can we work together and make the best games?' That's what it boils down to."

It's 11:30 p.m. by the time you leave the pub, and you know what's coming next. Despite the fact that it's raining, that crossing the remains of the bridge the first time was harrowing enough, and despite the fact that there is a less direct (but certainly less fraught) route back to the house, you know with chilling certainty that everyone is going back out the same way they came in. You know this because Molyneux loves games—and he never stops playing. ■

"One person could completely ruin it. The people and the culture are the most important things here" Webley

Coming soon

Lionhead and its satellites have a broad range of games in development.

Fable
Dev: Big Blue Box
Platform: Xbox
The most anticipated title for Xbox this side of *Halo 2* will be "finished when it's finished." Though the new name, *Fable* is still awaiting copyright approval, it perfectly describes the dark fairy tale [illegible] of this RPG.

B.C.
Dev: Intrepid
Platform: Xbox
Lead a tribe through a lost world filled with all manner of dinosaurs, homicidal apes and some of the most advanced graphics the world has ever seen. There are even polygonal [illegible] to the grass. We are you [illegible].

Black and White 2
Dev: B&W Studios
Platform: PC
The sequel to the two-million selling PC hit won't see a console port; instead the teams at Black and White Studios are developing the *Creature Isle* and *Black and White Next Generation* titles, which give the player more direct control.

Black and White NG
Dev: B&W Studios
Platform: Xbox, PS2
Rule Eden with your own giant creature and battle other gods for control of the indigenous people. Sound familiar? *Black and White Next Generation* is more than a spiritual successor to Molyneux's [illegible] hit, Populous.

The Movies
Dev: Lionhead
Platform: PC
Details are still scarce on this internally developed title, but the premise is (to quote team leader Adrian Moore): "god." Run a movie studio, where you control everything from which actors make it, to which [illegible] to [illegible].

"Project Dimitri"
Dev: Lionhead
Platform: TBA
This is years away, but Amazing Molyneux has given a hint of the complexity, in our very [illegible] section (*Xbox Nation* [illegible] 3). "At the moment we've got every single detail of a room simulated. Total realism." [illegible] hoping it's for Xbox.

THE ESRB VIDEO & COMPUTER GAME RATINGS

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EARLY CHILDHOOD

Titles rated "Early Childhood (EC)" have content that may be suitable for children ages three and older and do not contain any material that parents would find inappropriate.

EVERYONE

Titles rated "Everyone (E)" have content that may be suitable for persons ages six and older. These titles will appeal to people of many ages and tastes. They may contain minimal violence, some comic mischief (for example, slapstick comedy), or some crude language.

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Titles rated "Teen (T)" have content that may be suitable for persons ages 13 and older. Titles in this category may contain violent content, mild or strong language, and/or suggestive themes.

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RATING PENDING

Product has been submitted to the ESRB and is awaiting final rating.

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XRATED

Smart Reviews

Xbox Nation has set a new record for game reviews this issue, with a staggering 36 Chambers of Death filling these hallowed pages of Xrated. We've got *TimeSplitters 2*, the official Diamond in the Rough. Then there's *Dead to Rights*, the Over-boiled, Under-developed Crime Caper. There's even a Surprise Starlet, in the form of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

What struck us most this month, however, was the overwhelming number of "half-baked" titles—those which appear to have been rushed out the door before their time. Publisher-imposed deadlines? Quarterly earnings schedules? We understand the importance of turning a profit, but it's been proven time and again: *Bad games don't sell*. Publishers, please take note.

Buffy The Vampire Slayer 111

Taz: Wanted 121

Dynasty Warriors

How we rate

Like all forms of entertainment media, videogames are certainly a big business and we're not blind to that. Frankly, however, we don't care.

Here at *Xbox Nation*, we're not cemented to the standard "graphics/gameplay/sound/should I buy it?" routine. If that's what you're after, we suggest you look elsewhere. Our rating scale is strict. We have little patience for games that merely exist to fill a market niche or exploit a vapid, tired franchise. New games, ideally, should bring something new to the table. Most importantly, they should entertain.

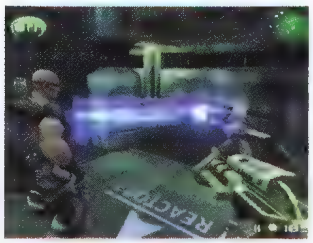
Our rating scale runs from zero to ten. Zero is video feces, pure and simple. Ten is about as close to perfection as any game is likely to get. Five is sheer mediocrity. Let us know how you feel about our grades by writing to us at XBN@ziffdavis.com.

Inside

100 TimeSplitters 2
102 Sega GT 2002
104 Dead to Rights
106 NFL 2K3
108 Madden 2003
110 NFL Fever 2003
111 Buffy the Vampire Slayer
112 Elder Scrolls 3: Morrowind
114 Dynasty Warriors 3
115 Terminator: Dawn of Fate
116 Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller
116 Robotech: Battlecry
117 NCAA 2K3
117 NCAA Football 2003
117 Splashdown
117 Enclave
118 Gun Metal
118 Bruce Lee
118 Prisoner of War
118 Jedi Starfighter
119 Aggressive Inline
119 Sega Soccer Slam
119 Matt Hoffman's Pro BMX 2
119 MLB Slugfest 20-03
120 David Beckham Soccer
120 Chase
120 Mike Tyson Boxing
120 Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer
121 Legends of Wrestling
121 Redcard Soccer 20-03
121 Marvel vs. Capcom 2
121 NFL Blitz 20-03
121 Totaled!
121 Taz: Wanted
121 Outlaw Golf
121 Tetris Worlds

TIME SPLITTERS 2

Free Radical conjures up one of the finest shooters since the seminal *Goldeneye*.



On some missions you have help from team-mates, and if you want help from your real buddies, you can play co-operatively. Co-op mode is one of *TS2*'s many wonders and, in our opinion, reason to buy the game

TimeSplitters was one of the early PlayStation 2's more popular titles, and with good reason. The game's developer, Free Radical, includes a number of ex-Rare personnel who had worked on the epic *GoldenEye*; while it wasn't particularly deep, *TimeSplitters* was elegantly-designed, skillfully balanced, and a multiplayer romp.

We're happy to report that *TimeSplitters 2* is even better, sporting a significant leap in graphics, better developed storylines, and the same smart design sense as its forerunner.

The game begins with a pair of human commandos storming onto the Timesplitters' ship, where one of the humans chases the 'Splitters through the time portal. This works on a *Quantum Leap*-style principle, since he then takes over the body and mission of a "native" in each time period. In fact, in the very first level he transforms into a female (!) Russian soldier, stationed at a dam that bears a more than passing resemblance to the one in *GoldenEye*. A knowing wink by Free Radical, certainly.

The rest of Story mode's 10 levels run the gamut from the American Wild West to a space station in the year 2401, and just about everything in between. Each level involves a number of different goals, many of which pop up spontaneously. These vary widely from combat to stealth, and include busting up illegal liquor barrels in prohibition-era Chicago, tailing a hacker through the streets of Neo-Tokyo, and freeing damsels in distress (er—yes, really).

Graphically, *TimeSplitters 2* is quite a treat. The game's engine has been optimized substantially over that of the original: particle systems, blur and lens effects, weather effects, inverse kinematic animation…it's all in here, and it all looks fantastic. And importantly, it still maintains a slippery-smooth frame rate and snappy control.

The level editor from the first game has been expanded and improved; and thanks to the Xbox hard drive, you can build some large and complex custom arenas. The game features numerous Challenge modes as well. Death - matches and gladiator contests are included, while others spin off from different Story mode goals (including a few stealth-based tasks).

There are a few problems, however. While storylines for each level are stronger, they could be stronger still; when a new goal crops up, it's rarely really explained what's happening or why. While fighting through Notre Dame cathedral, for example, you're suddenly instructed to "protect the hunchback" and help him and his girlfriend escape. Unfortunately, he just appears out of nowhere along with a throng of enemies, and he's easily mistaken for one of them. A brief cut scene would have helped immensely. Likewise, most levels include a boss character…but without any pause for exposition, you're not likely to even realize it's a boss until after he/she/it is defeated. The game is also occasionally a bit fuzzy about where you need to go next, or how to accomplish a given task. This leads to periods of trial-and-error and stumbling around...never a good thing.

But these are minor quibbles. *TimeSplitters 2* is a nicely balanced, infinitely controllable and visually distinctive ride that simply feels right.

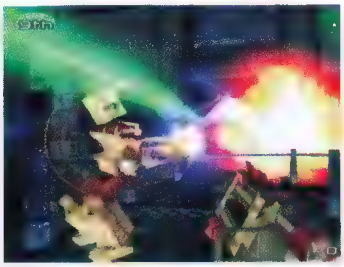
Jeff Lundrigan

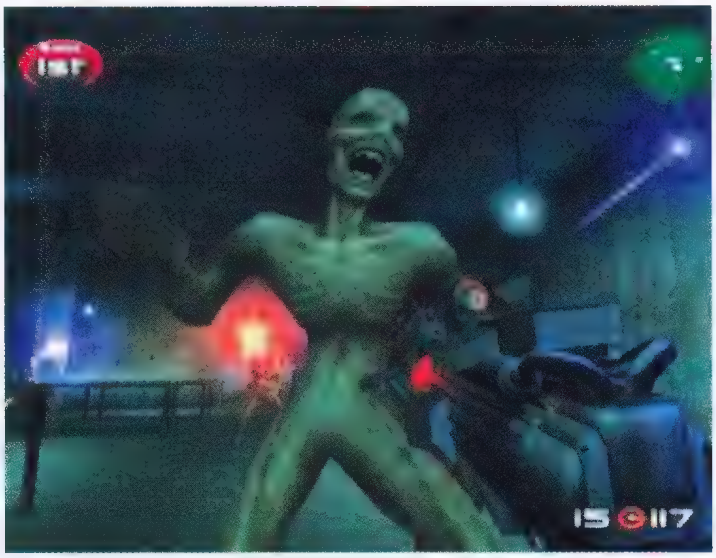
In the future, roaming bands of German techno DJs in jumpsuits, allied with mad, staring scientists, will push their brand of throbbing beats upon the unsuspecting time traveller. Give them a lead remix.

The Story mode's 10 levels run the gamut from the American **Wild West to a space station** in the year 2401.

Eight out of Ten

Dev : Free Radical
Pub : Eidos
Players : 1-4
Automatics: For the people
Release Date : Out Now



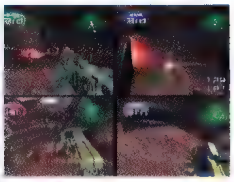


The overall style is more cartoon-like than realistic, and suits the lighthearted approach perfectly; the gratuitously jiggly damsels, for example, are self-consciously over the top caricatures, genuinely amusing rather than offensive, though the zombies get a bit gnarly. The lighting is where the engine really excells, however. Colored light is used to gruesome effect...

TimeSplitters 2 supports up to 4-way split-screen but, sadly, does not support online play

Screensplitters

TS2 boasts a superb range of multiplayer levels and challenges



Like the original, *TS2* features a full range of multiplayer options for up to four players. Literally every mode in the game is mulitplayer enabled—including Story mode, which features two-player cooperative play (Mmm, cooperative play.) Challenge and Arcade modes are made a bit more frenetic by the addition of a user selectable number of tenacious bots. In fact, just about every feature of every arena, from weapon selection to victory conditions, can be modified If that's not good enough, you can still build your own from scratch.

SEGA GT 2002

WOW Entertainment is a mere stoplight away from catching *Gran Turismo*

■ Woah, look at all that stuff on screen. *Sega GT 2003* wins *XBN*'s annual award for "Racing Game With the Most Packed Heads-up Display."

Daisy Dukes

Chronicle Mode: Ever want to speed through the streets while driving the cars of yesteryear? Well now you can in Sega GT 2002's Chronicle mode. Make your way through the '60s, '70s, '80s, '90s and aughts with classic cars from the distant to not-so far-off past. If anything distinguishes Sega's racer from the competition, this is it.

From the mid-'80s through the late '90s, Sega singlehandedly defined the racing genre with a string of hits (mostly designed by Yu Suzuki's AM2 development team), including *OutRun*, *Daytona USA*, and *Sega Rally Championship*.

In 1997, *Gran Turismo* for the PlayStation changed everything. Despite being powered by 32-bit hardware (considerably inferior to Sega's arcade boards), *Gran Turismo* set new standards in car selection, track variety, graphical effects, and realism. Sega tried to rally the forces with *Scud Racer* and *Ferrari F355*, but it became clear that lessons learned in the arcade did not necessarily translate into success at home. Now, after five years of playing catch up, Sega finally has an answer for Sony's premier racing franchise.

Developed by WOW Entertainment *(Sega GT, House of the Dead)*, *Sega GT 2002* builds upon the Dreamcast original in virtually every way. With more than 20 car manufacturers included, finding a sweet ride shouldn't be an issue. The game has more than 125 cars available—from more common rides like the Mazda RX-7 to exotic roadsters like the Lotus Elise—and nearly everyone should be able to find something to fit his or her tastes.

■ The inclusion of such gearhead wet dreams as the Nissan Skyline and the Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VII provides at least a vicarious thrill for those U.S. drivers resigned to never seeing such cars in real life.

Of course, what good are dozens of cars unless there's a sexy variety of tracks on which to race? *Sega GT 2002* comes through on this count as well. With a dozen tracks on hand (not including mirrored or reversed variations), players can barrel through city streets, burn rubber around oval speedways, or muscle their way through snow-capped mountainsides.

Managing these tracks depends largely on the type of car selected and how it's tuned. Armchair grease monkeys will be glad to know that a wealth of customizations is a quick purchase away, allowing virtual car buyers to tweak tire type, weight reduction, exhaust tuning, suspension, brakes, and much, *much* more. Even with this level of optional tinkering on hand, it never gets too complicated to enjoy, and the result of each modification is always evident. This gives the player a sense of immediate reward for his purchases, and goes a long way towards creating a deeper racing experience than most.

The result of all this management is a game that controls especially well. Handling is spot-on, and whether playing through the rich franchise mode, blasting through a quick race (solo or with a friend), or taking a ride through the generations in the excellent Chronicle mode, every press of the accelerator is a thrilling one.

The visuals, while slightly less flashy than those of *Gran Turismo*, are excellent, with superb car models and

Armchair grease monkeys will be glad to know that **a wealth of customizations** await.

Dev : WOW Entertainment
Pub : Sega
Players : 1–2
Let's: Motor
Release Date : Out now

■ *Sega GT 2002* gets the award for "most improved sequel". The Dreamcast game lacked depth and charisma; with more than 125 cars and over a dozen superbly designed courses, this has both.

tracks. The graphics are easily as good as those of *Project Gotham Racing*, and offer some of the most realistic scenery and lighting to date. The music is typical Sega jazz-light-rock fusion and, thankfully, can be muted in the options menu. It would have been nice to be able to rip our own soundtracks.

So is *Sega GT 2002* the Xbox' *Gran Turismo*? Well, not quite; Sega's game doesn't feature a rally mode and the selection of cars, while substantial, is not as bloated as *Turismo*'s. *Sega GT 2002* is, however, an extremely well-designed, very playable game with a fair learning curve and gorgeous visuals. Well done.
James Mielke

Eight out of Ten

Did you see that!?

If you think that playing *Sega GT 2002* is a blast...well, you're right. But half the fun of expertly navigating a course is watching the full replay of your bad self in action afterward. An impressively wide selection of user-controlled camera-angles adds to the allure. And it's good for taking "action-packed" screenshots, too.

DEAD TO RIGHTS

More *K-9* than *Heat*, Namco's cop thriller is a crushing disappointment

■ It looks exciting, but the combat is almost always reduced to boring punch/kick combos. The admittedly deep roster of moves are nealry unusable, as they get you killed in short order.

In development for nearly three years, *Dead to Rights*' gritty subject matter and buzzword-friendly timing ("two-fisted, John Woo-meets-*The-Matrix* gunplay!" doesn't appear to be disappearing from the cultural landscape anytime soon) have brought the game the sort of anticipation unusual for a game of unknown pedigree. So much, in fact, that it was with great excitement that *Xbox Nation* previewed the game for its issue two cover story.

It was understood, of course, that *DTR* was not seeking to match the gaping, open-ended experience of *Grand Theft Auto 3*. As *Halo* so elegantly demonstrated, there is still a place for tightly-scripted, linear adventure games—provided that the gameplay possibilities *within* that self-contained plotline are adequately unrestricted. A spectacular variety of moves and gameplay styles, along with what appeared to be an engaging, "mature" storyline, gave us high hopes for Namco's first Xbox adventure.

Perhaps "misguided" is the best word to describe the meandering cacophony of over-the-top violence, heavy-handed dialog, and inane mini-gaming that is *Dead to Rights*.

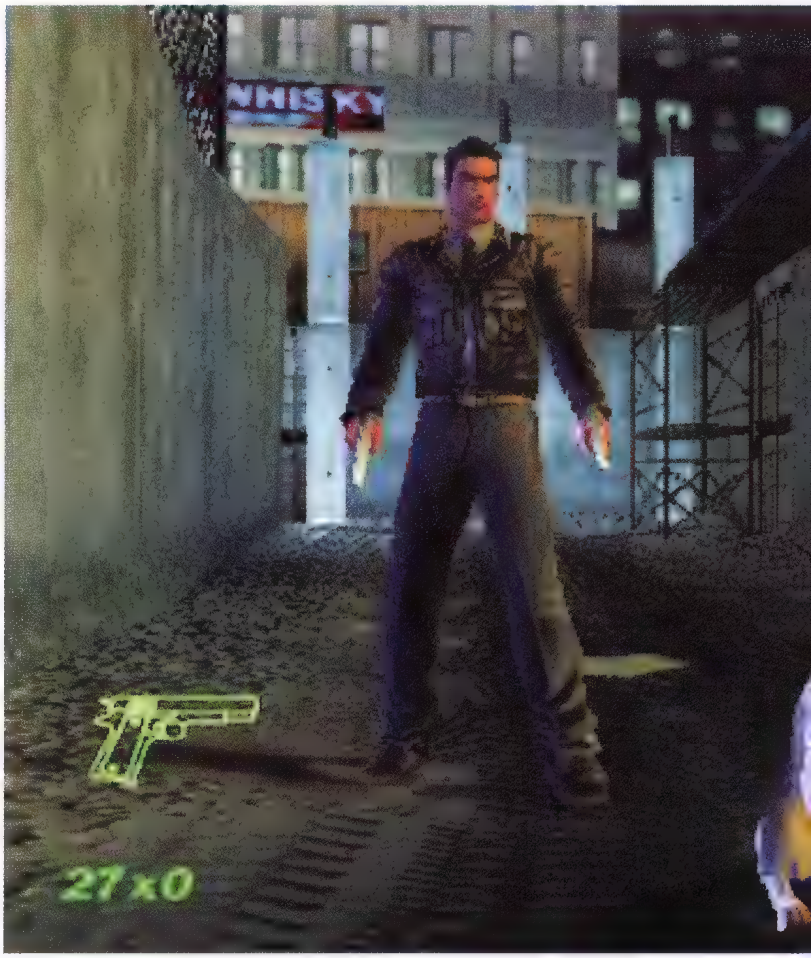
The game's combat engine, which provides for the bulk of your engagement with its occupants, arouses and frustrates in equal portions. The sheer variety of moves and weapons—including (*wince*) *Max Payne*-inspired bullet-time acrobatics, a host of elaborate disarm maneuvers (most of which are capped by a point-blank bullet to the offending enemy's cranium), and the occasional employment of your dog Shadow—all expand your array of destructive possibilities quite nicely. A flawed targeting system, however, constantly intrudes; far too often, we would find our gun locked on some fop with a pop gun some 50 yards away, while his pal (remarkably similar in appearance) stood three feet from our body, lacing it with rounds from his double-gauge shotgun. Combined with a dicey camera, the whole experience comes off as ambitious but, sadly, disappointingly awkward.

These technical flaws, however nagging, would be forgettable were the game's narrative able to effectively drive the action. But rather than coming across as forcefully dramatic or self-consciously tongue-in-cheek, the script (and accompanying voice-acting) feels stiff, confused, and so earnest as to make us wince on more than one occasion. Underwhelming set-pieces—including a exceptionally tasteless exotic dancer scene (see sidebar)—do nothing but exacerbate a situation bereft of any real drama or emotion.

While the game employs some decent special effects, the overall visual presentation is decidedly lackluster—helped in no way by the game's PlayStation 2 upbringing. Characters look like the polygonal models that they are, and the overall use of color and lighting is simply uninspired.

Alas, *Dead to Rights*' biggest flaw is its general lack of charisma, reflected in nearly every facet of the game. Uneven graphics, hollow gameplay contrivances, and a wholesale lack of compelling drama mar the enormous effort which was clearly put into the game.

Evan Shamoon

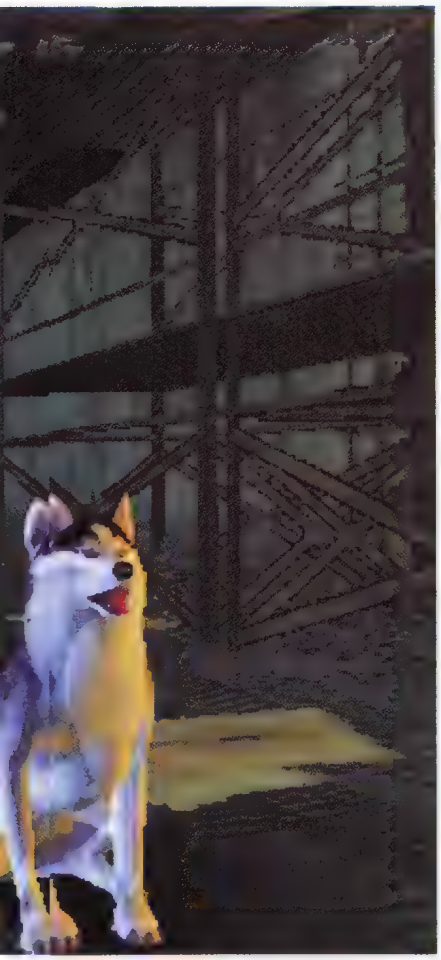


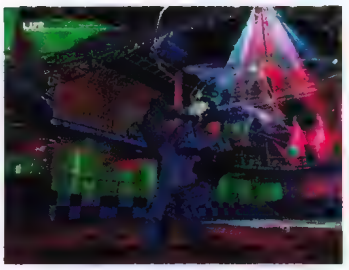
■ (Above) Even Jack Slate's dog, Shadow, is ignoring him. His canine friend, who is both better animated and better drawn than his master, is apparently unhappy about the script. Woof.

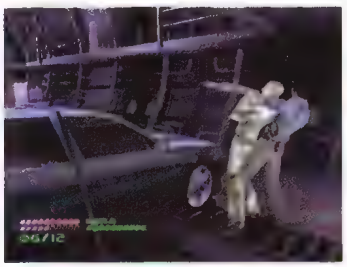
Dead to Rights' biggest flaw is its general **lack of charisma**, reflected in almost every aspect of the game.

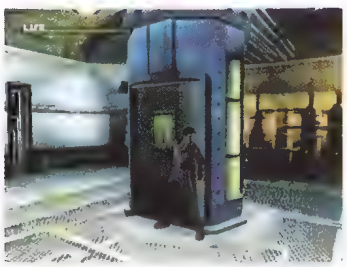
Four out of Ten

Dev: Namco
Pub: Namco
Players: 1
Dog's: Breakfast
Release Date: Out Now









■ *DTR* struggles to elevate its gameplay above mediocrity, but falls well short. The minigames—such as this prison workout, in which you're actually attempting to win cigarettes from various inmates by being stronger/faster/better than them—quickly grow tiresome.

Bada-bing, bada wack

The team was apparently so happy with the end result of this strip club sequence that they used it in its E3 demo to attract the requisite number of girlfriendless industry insiders. But instead of titillating, the whole sorry affair adds 10 tasteless minutes of excruciatingly dull Simon-says style gameplay to an event that should take no more than 30 seconds. And her legs look weird. Really weird...

NFL 2K3

Visual Concepts pulls yet another rabbit out of its reflection-mapped helmet

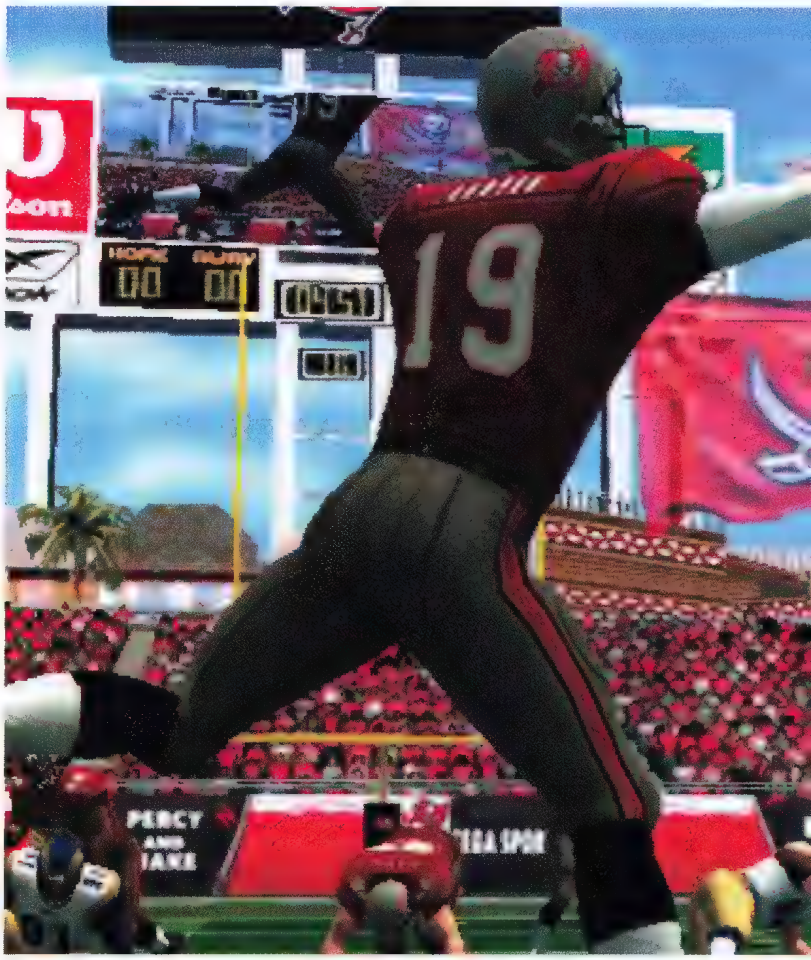
■ "Hey, watch out! Three inches higher and my mother would never have seen any grandchildren."

For years, sports games have been one of Sega's strongest suits. Indeed, its *Joe Montana Football* games of the early '90s nearly buried the *Madden* series before it got rolling, and the 2K series has been inching ever closer to dethroning that annual champ since its inception. This year, the two franchises are neck-and-neck, and it's really a matter of personal preference that separates them.

NFL 2K3 is pure pigskin joy; from its ESPN-sponsored presentation to the flawless gameplay, it's a winner. Visual Concepts managed to take the already strong *NFL 2K2* and bring it up a full notch, improving the game in just about every area imaginable.

As in past years, *2K3* edges a bit more towards arcade gameplay than *Madden* does, but that's hardly a knock. The way the game moves and flows is immediately impressive, due largely to the nuanced animation systems employed. Combined with the impressive responsiveness from the players and a silky-smooth control scheme, the game gets our vote for having the "best feel" of this year's gridiron contestants. The passing and the running games are well-executed and feel realistic, although some of the finer points, like hot routes and audibles, can be tricky to pull off. Interestingly, player fatigue seems to play more of a role here than in any of the other gridiron games—work your stud running back too hard and he won't hit the gaps at full speed. The replays themselves are truly remarkable; player textures and animations are so close to real you'll swear you're watching a TV recap. The AI is excellent as well, with defenders that swarm to the ball and linemen who really know how to lay down a block.

NFL 2K3 truly shines thanks to its recent marriage to sports network ESPN. Thanks to the familiar *SportsCenter* jingles, graphics, and overlays, *NFL 2K3* is able to replicate the feeling of watching a game on TV. The commentary is top-notch, even down to using a telestrator (and split-screen windows) to demonstrate key points during replays. *2K3* picks the game's standout player at the half, and the Franchise mode features a nice weekly recap that shows the best play of the week—even if it didn't happen in the game you played. What's more, you'll be able to take the game online and participate in Sega's national challenge mode, where you'll be ranked against other players based on your in-game achievements.



■ From the individual fingers on the player models to their staggeringly realistic animations (and the transitions *between* those animations), *NFL 2K3* is the most graphically impressive of the pigskin lot.

The AI is excellent, with **defenders that swarm to the ball** and linemen that really know how to lay down a block.

NFL 2K3 stumbles a bit here and there. There simply aren't as many features to be found as in *Madden*; the lack of a play editor hurts, as does the inability to save midway through a game. What's more, the point-and-click play-calling interface can be unwieldy, especially when you're executing a two-minute drill with no time-outs.

Nonetheless, it's virtually a photo finish between the two games, and the choice between the two really comes down to a matter of preference. If you're looking for a pure sim with plenty of extras, plunk down the cash for *Madden*. If you're looking to smash it up with your buds over Xbox Live, then *NFL 2K3* is your best bet this year.

Dan DiGiacomo

Nine out of Ten

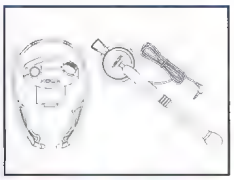
Dev : Visual Concepts
Pub : Sega
Players : 1-4
Is it live? : Or is it Memorex?
Release Date : Out Now

■ The Franchise Mode adds quite a bit to *NFL 2K3*. Not only does it allow you to make the front office decisions you've always wanted, but it also gives a good sense of how difficult running an NFL front office can be. After you piece together the ultimate team on a shoestring budget, winning the Big Game is a significantly more rewarding experience.

■ "Ballet is a contact sport. Football is a hitting sport." —Vince Lombardi

NFL 2K3 goes Live

"I have to pause the game. The DNA test results are in—and yes, I am in fact your daddy."



So you've built your dynasty, and whipping the computer's ass is no longer enough. What's next? Well. Sega has delivered one of the best online gameplay experiences of the pigskin lot. Players can hook up for gridiron battles via Xbox Live, and because of the broadband factor, play is absolutely seamless—with no noticealbe lag. The Communicator headset is initially liberating, but you'll soon be pushing the mute button as some 6-year-old kid named "XgAmER-5000" calls you a "Jabroni" for the 147th time. The best reply, of course, is putting seven up on the scoreboard.

MADDEN NFL 2003

The champ returns, and he's looking fit; *Madden NFL 2003* raises the bar once again

If you have an Xbox, love football, and are as consistently broke as we are, there are going to be some tough choices to be made this year...

If ever there was a year for the mighty *Madden* franchise to stumble on its way to the great videogame end zone, this was it. Sega has focused on perfecting its sports games, starting with the *NFL 2K* series, while Microsoft stunned critics by coming strong out of the gate last year with its first foray into pigskin gaming, *NFL Fever 2002*. But, in a display of the gumption all champions have ingrained in their very beings, Tiburon managed to dig in its cleats and improve upon the storied *Madden* formula once again.

Madden NFL 2003 is a football fan's dream game, and an amazing study of just how far the genre has come in the 20 years since Atari's blocky *Football* first enraptured us. This is an extremely *complete* game, and its numerous features are what set it apart in what has truly become a game of inches against its competitors.

Though it still leans towards being a pure football sim rather than an all-out arcade fun-fest, *Madden* strikes a great gameplay balance. The players have weight to them; they don't make impossibly fast cuts or speed across the field like jackrabbits. This lends a sense of realism to the game, though it can be frustrating when scrambling to avoid a sack or trying to make a touchdown-saving tackle. It's not easy to establish the run, but the game takes momentum into account; virtually every dive up the middle goes for a handful of yards, and brutal backs seem to get stronger as the game wears on. Quarterback control is also improved, while taking the reigns of receivers before they catch a pass helps boost completion rates considerably.

In addition to the now-standard exhibition, tournament, season and beefed-up franchise modes, players can now hone their skills in the unique and fun Mini Camp mode. Each of the NFL's 32 teams has a mini-camp based on one game skill, whether it's batting passes, burying field goals, or precision passing. As if that's not enough, there's also the Two-Minute Drill, Practice, Situational Mode, and Football 101—an informative instructional mode narrated by John Madden himself.

Several noticeable differences in presentation separate this 13th iteration of *Madden* football, not the least of which is the addition of *Monday Night Football* play-by-play man Al Michaels in the commentary booth, supplanting longtime Madden companion Pat Summerall.

While not quite as graceful in motion as Sega's *NFL 2K3, Madden* sports superb (if still a bit squat) player models and creates an inspiring NFL ambiance.

...an amazing study of just **how far the genre has come** in the 20 years since Atari's blocky *Football.*

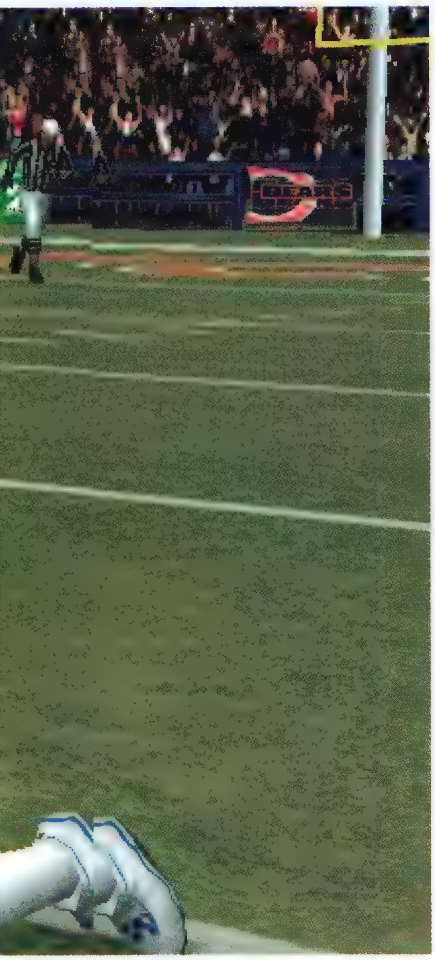
There are only a few minor points and stumbling blocks keeping *Madden 2003* from scoring the ever-elusive 10. For one, the player models seem somewhat stiff when walking around between plays and look downright bizarre when helmetless. EA's annoying AI is also back, ensuring that any time you get up by roughly 17 points on a computer opponent, your team defense will become as porous as a sponge.

More significantly, however, *Madden* doesn't offer online support, so if you're hankering to log onto Xbox Live to take on your pal across the country, then look elsewhere. *Madden 2003* doesn't disappoint; the gameplay is superb, the extras will keep you coming back for more, and admit it: After all these years, you're still fascinated by the sight of Señor Madden's immense, meaty head.

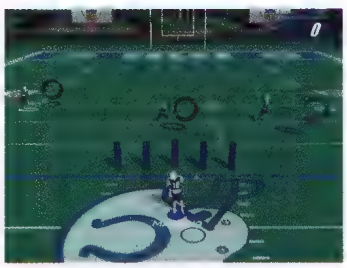
Dan DiGiacomo

Nine out of Ten

Dev : Tiburon
Pub : EA Sports
Players: 1 - 4
Those eyes : Still scary
Release Date : Out Now



■ Al Michaels turns in a solid, if unspectacular, debut, though the commentary has improved greatly over the past few years. There are very few repeated phrases, and Madden sounds as loony as ever.



■ Training camp is fun, aside from the part where they find a gun and six kilos of coke in your Dallas Cowboys gym bag.

Rookies are for videogames

Don't hedge your bets on videogame simulations

Those of you who watched ESPN's coverage of this year's NFL draft may recall a number of commercials for *Madden 2003,* touting the game's inclusion of all this year's rookies. Perhaps this year more than any other, rookies make a huge impact, and can put up big numbers. In the several simulated seasons we played through, the rookie-heavy Houston Texans (led by first-year QB David Carr) made the playoffs or even won their division. Analysts consider this a statistical impossibility akin to TV's Webster bedding pop vixen Britney Spears.

NFL FEVER 2003

A year from now, this third stringer could find itself in the starting lineup

Dev : Mircrosoft Game Studios
Pub : Microsoft
Players : 1-4
Fever: 103 F
Release Date : Out Now

Regardless of their weight, linemen are all portrayed as tubs of lard...a fact that won't sit well with Jevon Kearse.

NFL Fever 2002 was something of an enigma. Rarely do sports games make a competent debut, but _Fever_ bucked the trend and excelled in its first iteration. _Fever 2003_ is an even better game, and is astoundingly close to toppling EA's mighty _Madden_ and Sega's _NFL 2K_ franchises.

It's just not there quite yet.

Fever 2003 is full of innovative gameplay touches that separate it from the pack. It has a full arsenal of plays on both sides of the ball, selectable by formation. But there's also the recommended play category, which includes a handful of plays the experts suggest for any given situation. It's not foolproof, but it's helpful in pivotal situations, especially for a newbie.

In fact, _Fever_ could be the most accessible of all the pigskin games. For instance, you can check receiver routes just before the snap with a simple press of the "Y" button; route arrows pop up in front of your receivers on the field so you can get a better idea of where everyone will end up. When a receiver gets open, the small controller-button designation hovering above his head lights up, making it easy complete passes even in the toughest situations.

There are a number of cool play modes, including a Classic Challenge tournament against some of the NFL's greatest teams ever, and the Dynasty mode is fairly deep. In fact, it may be the first season mode to take individual player performances into account on a game-by-game basis. Guys coming off big games get a bonus on their overall rating, while those who stink it up lose a notch. If your offensive line gives up a bunch of sacks, for instance, every guy in the unit loses a point.

You would think that it would be hard to write captions for five football games. And you, sir, would be correct. Note the folds and creases on the players' jerseys, and their jiggly guts as well.

Fever 2003 is full of **innovative gameplay touches** that separate it from the pack.

It's a cool way to create continuity within a season, and adds a nice touch of strategy to an already complex game.

Sadly, _Fever 2003_ fumbles with its presentation. The commentary is weak, and loses points for repetition (play-by-play guy Kevin Calabro mutters "I hear ya" _ad nauseam_) and mispronunciations (Calabro calls the Jacksonville Jaguars the "Jagwires"). Graphically speaking, _Fever 2003_ is a mixed bag. The player models are incredibly detailed—right down to the tiny holes in their jerseys—and are fluidly animated, but they're rendered cartoonily, lending to the game's already notable arcade feel.

NFL Fever 2003 is a fun football game, and considering it's only in its second year, is a great achievement for Microsoft. It offers near-flawless online play (see feature on page 38), and will likely have the most seamless interface with the Xbox Live network. Overall, _Fever 2003_ is definitely worth checking out...but only after you've tired of _Madden 2003_ or _NFL 2K3_.

Dan DiGiacomo

Eight out of Ten

Welcome, Texans!

The 2002 season marks the introduction of the expansion Houston Texans into the NFL, and this year's crop of pro football games reflects the sweeping changes the Texans bring with them.

"Wrong-way" Corrigan ended up drinking Gatorade with the other team's cheerleaders.

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER

Fangs for the mammaries

Dev : The Collective
Pub : Electronic Arts
Players : 1
Bump: in the night
Release Date : Out Now

" Take that and shovel it!" (*Groan – Ed*)

Buffy The Vampire Slayer **neither sucks nor bites. On the contrary; in development since before the Xbox was even two dollar signs in the eyes of Bill Gates, the third-person 3D action adventure *Buffy* is actually quite a killer.**

Vampires abound in the fictional burg of Sunnydale, CA., and young Buffy Summers has been chosen to kick them in the face, bleat out one-liners while doing so, and then dispatch them in all manner of interesting ways including, but not limited to: decapitation, holy water bath, sunlight skin removal, impaling, the 5:15 Southbound train, hellfire shower, etc. As she proceeds merrily through Sunnydale's killing fields, Buffy runs afoul of an evil plot to resurrect the undead creep Master. Violence in mass quantity ensues.

Graphically sharp and combined with gameplay that has been similarly honed, *Buffy* is one of those rare titles that does the Xbox justice. Defeated vampires explode in a gorgeous puff of dust, the environments (especially the otherworldly ones featuring skies that seem to be aflame) are suitably delectable, and the characters all modeled to perfection. In combat, Buffy has access to all manner of punches, kicks, throws, and over-the-top super attacks, or can put paid to her foes with some weapons both mundane (shovels, mops) and exotic (a dual-canister water gun that holds both vampire–unfriendly holy water and hellfire).

The XK 2002 (for those "not so fresh" days).

Graphically sharp, with **gameplay similarly honed**, Buffy is one of those rare titles that does the Xbox justice.

This game holds a universal appeal; fans of the TV show that inspired the game will relish the opportunity to step into Buffy's fashionable shoes and plant said footwear into the posterior of many a vampire, demon, and creepy-crawly. Those who have never seen the show will enjoy the game for its solid play, for its comic zingers ("Who would have thought hellfire wouldn't melt plastic?" Buffy muses after filling her water gun.), and for the sheer enjoyment that comes from dealing out video justice to the ungrateful dead.

Oddly, there's no option to save the game, and this very nearly stakes the heart of *Buffy*. None. The game saves automatically at selected checkpoints, but some levels are absolutely huge and feature one (or even zero) spots where a player's progress is recorded. Tack on ending levels that feature deadly-difficult boss fights as well as a series of forced and rather clichéd jumping puzzles, and the dearth of save points becomes a major sticking point.

Remarkably fun to play and pretty to look at, *Buffy* is a fine example of how it's possible to take a good license and from it birth a *really* good game. The Collective got it right and *Buffy* just, well, slayed us with its solidity.

Greg Orlando

Eight out of Ten

Less baking, more staking

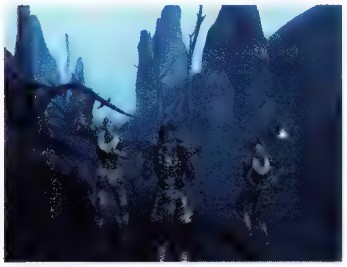
Like her oppressed female forbears, Buffy Summers knows full well the joys of the mop and the broom. Still, this is the 21st century and seven-league strides have been made in the women's liberation movement. Now, Buffy uses the tools of feminine oppression in her quest to rid Sunnydale of the undead.

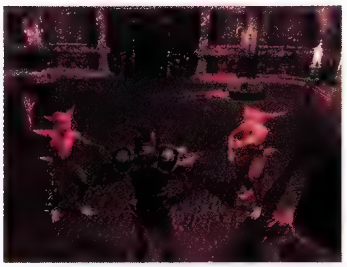
A wooden stake is one of most handy tools in the game. It's also possible to decapitate vampires with hand-held weapons, expose them to sunlight, and destroy them by chucking them into lava.

ELDER SCROLLS 3: MORROWIND

Massively singleplayer

Dev : Bethesda Softworks
Pub : Bethesda Softworks
Players : 1
Love it : Or Hate it
Release Date : Out Now





Morrowind is a strange mix of beautifully drawn environments and sub-standard character modeling and animations.

As the first RPG to make its way onto the Xbox, *Elder Scrolls 3: Morrowind* had some big shoes to fill. And for those with the patience of a saint, the game fills them quite adequately.

Morrowind is immense, and perhaps the most immersive Xbox game since *Halo*. Set in a massive game world that takes provides for hundreds of hours of exploration, *Morrowind* redefines the console RPG with its sheer scope. The game hangs on a basic "lone adventurer saving the world" plotline, but the world—packed with thousands of NPCs in dozens of locations—is tinged with overtones of religious zealotry and racism, as well as swords and sorcery. Its plot unfolds in bits and pieces, with the nuance and subtlety of a novel.

After building your character from scratch—you'll pick his or her race, class, special abilities, face, and even birth sign—you're set free in the world to do as you please. There are guilds to join, hundreds of quests to take on, and plenty of dungeons to explore; *Morrowind* has no timetable for completing the main quest. In many ways, the freedom it affords makes *Morrowind* feel like a massively multiplayer online role-playing game… without the MMO. The game's numerous quests take you on a tour of what is truly an astonishing world. In between massive cities and small villages, the countryside is dotted with interesting foliage and carefully hidden ruins just begging to be explored. Even beyond the quests, *Morrowind* offers amazing freedom: Want a house in a big city? Kill the owner and take up residence. Of course, there are repercussions for every action, and murder leads to jail time, which dulls your skills.

Guy with sword: "Listen man, I'm just an extra. How about you pretend to kill me and I'll fall over and pretend to be dead. I'll even give you all of my spoons."

The game's numerous quests take you on a tour of what is a **truly an astonishing** world.

Graphically, *Morrowind* is equal parts stunning and disappointing. The locales are magnificent—striding into a city, with its flags flapping in the breeze as the sun dips below the horizon, can be a breathtaking affair. The characters themselves suffer in comparison, however, beleaguered by choppy animations and polygonal sloppiness.

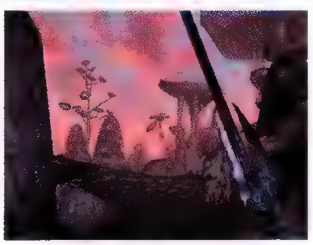
Ultimately, *Morrowind*'s biggest selling point—its expansive scope—is also its undoing. The game is daunting, with some quests requiring huge amounts of travel, while others depend on overly complex item-swapping errands. In addition, battles are clunky exercises, weighed down by poor quality PC–style creature animations and frustratingly low hit rates.

Still, *Morrowind* is a quite an achievement. Those willing to invest the time will be rewarded with hundreds of hours of gameplay and more replay value than you can shake a jewel-encrusted longsword at.

Dan DiGiacomo

Eight out of Ten

Spoonman!



Between *Morrowind*'s primary quests and its guild missions, there's plenty to keep you busy. Of course, you're gonna need money and plenty of it. Fortunately, you can take just about anything that isn't nailed down, including silverware, pots, random spices, and books. This could get you in trouble with the local constabulary, but provided you're able to pull it off, you can make a healthy living.

"You distract the guy with the sword, while I kick him in the nads." The hero encounters all manner of nasties in the sprawling world of *Morrowind*, and most of them have spiky objects pointed at you.

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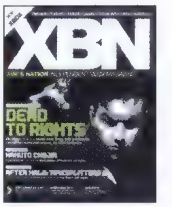

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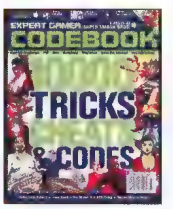

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DYNASTY WARRIORS 3

In days of old when knights were bold, and toilets weren't invented...

Dev : Koei
Pub : Koei
Players : 1-2
Dynasty : of pain
Release Date : Out Now

Please disregard the Japanese text. Instead, concentrate on the pretty lighting effects and cool Chinese warriors.

Let's face it: a day without slaughter (even simulated video slaughter) is a day worth flushing down the hopper. Koei and its gorgeous 3D arcade slasher cum battlefield simulation *Dynasty Warriors 3* provides approximately 110 percent of the recommended daily allowance of Vitamin K (for killitude) and, moreover, manages to provide every single bit of its brutality in a most beautiful fashion.

Loosely based on the ancient Chinese novel Romance of the Three Kingdoms, *Dynasty Warriors* thrusts players into a series of battles between the forces of Wei, Wu, and Shu. Each faction has its own cadre of fearsome warriors, and each hero comes equipped with his own unique melee weapon and a bow for long distance sniping. After customizing the hero by selecting his weapon, the items he'll carry into the fight, and choosing his bodyguards' look and general inclination (attack or defend), he'll be dropped onto a battlefield and asked to kill the opposition, destroy the enemy leader, and preserve the life of his commanding officer. Role-playing game elements allow a hero to improve his statistics by whacking enemy generals, and items found in gameplay can be used to augment attributes such as jumping, ability, and luck.

Once the war begins, *Dynasty Warriors 3* plays out like the World Series of beat-'em-ups. The game presents an absolutely astounding number of friendly and hostile forces, as well as such beasts of burden as horses and elephants, on screen at one time, and each combatant is beautifully rendered. For the most part, the Xbox handles this marvelously, but there is the slightest bit of both popup and slowdown to be had. There's also a decent amount of fog that chokes the game's battlefields, and we've yet to ingest enough hallucinogens and Cookie Crisp cereal to believe this haze is one of *Dynasty Warriors'* underhyped features.

The war started when Sun Wu suggested it was pronounced TOE-may-TOE and Sun Pin said Sun Wu was sniffing glue. "It's pronounced TOE-mah-TOE," he said. Millions died.

Dynasty Warriors 3 **provides 110 percent of the recommended daily allowance** of Vitamin K

Though the game is a bit simplistic in its presentation and controls (it's actually possible to win every battle by repeatedly jamming on one button), this simplicity also works to the game's advantage. Because players are not hampered by the need to learn a complex series of arcane attacks, they can instead concentrate on strategy—guiding their heroes to hot spots, attacking key enemies, and rushing to aid beleaguered comrades. It also means that players will be instantly able to enjoy the game's most charming quality: the ability to send a hero into a massed enemy army and plow through it like a white-hot knife through butter.

Greg Orlando

Eight out of Ten

Dumbo?

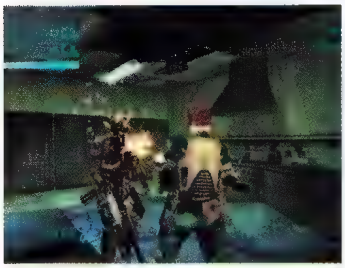
One neat element in *Dynasty Warriors 3* is the addition of elephant troops, that is to say, soldiers who ride elephants. These fearsome fighters are found on the game's Nanman campaign, and it's entirely possible to turn the enemy's greatest weapon against him.

Hardened Fighter Yu Sing went off at 4-to-1 at the eighth race at Belmont. Sadly, he placed out of the running, and we lost $10.

TERMINATOR: DAWN OF FATE

Dumping iron

Dev : Paradigm Entertainment
Pub : Infogrames
Players : 1
Please: Let it End
Release Date : Out Now



There's only ever been one good Terminator game, *Terminator Future Shock* by Bethesda (see *Morrowind* in this issue). *Dawn of Fate* doesn't even come close.

The thing that's likely to pop into your head about five minutes into *Terminator: Dawn of Fate*—immediately after "F*ck, I hope I didn't throw away that receipt"—is, "Did anyone at Infogrames or Paradigm actually play this thing before shoving it out the door?"

The game starts off promisingly enough. A nicely done animated intro sets up that the game is supposed to fill in the backstory of Kyle Reese, taking you through the events in the future that led up to him going back through time to save Sarah Connor. Granted, you can't help but notice that Reese doesn't look or sound anything like Michael Biehn…but so far it's cool.

Then the gameplay starts, and things are never that good again.

Dawn of Fate is played from a third-person perspective, as seen through a series of fixed camera angles. Sort of like *Resident Evil* or *Metal Gear Solid*…except completely flawed. In fact, if one were deliberately trying to code the perfect example of how not to handle this kind of control scheme, it would look, function, and frustrate a lot like this.

Much of the game takes place in tight, mazelike corridors and passageways, so the camera shifts about once every two or three steps. By itself this is dizzying enough to make you wish for an intravenous Dramamine drip, not to mention invariably leaving you completely confused as to where the enemies are now located. Making things even worse, of course, is the fact that the controls also switch perspective—meaning that more often than not, you're left running the wrong way. You're expecting to fight machines; unfortunately, the one you fight most is the control pad.

Believe us when we say that *Terminator Dawn of Fate* is impossibly bad. How bad? Imagine finding out on your 18th birthday that Lance Bass was your father…

You expect to **fight machines**. Unfortunately, the one you fight most is the control pad.

It must be taken into account that no third-person game of the 3D era has ever had a perfect camera/control setup, but you'd expect something so basic to gameplay to be functional at least 90 percent of the time. Even 80 percent might be acceptable…but *Dawn of Fate* arguably dips into single digit territory. Much of the time it's total guesswork which direction you need to hold in order to move the way you want to. It doesn't help that the auto-targeting is haphazard as well.

There are many other problems, including some iffy level designs and a lack of pace. Too often the game finishes loading an area only to have it turn out to be a short corridor with nothing in it, ending with another door and a pause to load the next section. The AI is appalling too; Terminator units just walk towards you, while your fellow soldiers just stand in place.

Inexcusably awful.

Jeff Lundrigan

Two out of Ten

Magic Feet?

Now, you'd think that taking on your average Terminator hand-to-hand, would be nothing short of suicide. However, in *Dawn of Fate*, not only is this possible, it winds up being the most powerful tactic in the game—a ludicrous foot sweep move. That's right, just sweep the feet out from under a Terminator…

"Ged oud of tha way you moh-ron!" One of your team members gets in on the action, the hard way.

CRAZY TAXI 3: HIGH ROLLER

Dev : Sega
Pub : Acclaim
Players : 1-2

Not quite : Crazy enuf
Release : Out Now

The *Crazy Taxi* series is one of Sega's most successful cross-platform franchises, having made appearances on the Dreamcast, PlayStation 2, and Gamecube. As with most ports to the Xbox, Microsoft has insisted *Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller* include new and exclusive content. Though we're duly impressed by the new bits and pieces—most notably the new Vegas-styled level, "Glitter Oasis"—we're left wondering if *Crazy Taxi 3* is actually one whole level crazier than *Crazy Taxi 2*.

At first glance, not a whole lot seems to have changed. Taxis now have shiny chassis and working headlights, and when the player does a "crazy boost," the taxi leaves behind fiery skid marks. The fire effects are a particularly nice touch; it's now much easier to tell when you're at top speed. Overall, however, these graphics are decidedly mediocre by today's standards.

Glitter Oasis, the new level, is split into two regions—a brightly lit strip of casinos, and a series of hills and canyons just past the edge of town. The level provides some unique challenges, particularly when navigating steep mountain roads from checkpoint to checkpoint. It's a fun level to play, even though it suffers from framerate problems from time to time.

As a rebuttal to what might be considered a somewhat repetitive single-player game, Sega has included a quest mode called Crazy X. This mode requires that the player complete a variety of wacky challenges, such as jumping off a giant ramp, playing a game of football with other cars as oncoming defenders, or knocking down giant pins in a bowling minigame. The challenges get progressively more difficult, with the last few requiring incredibly precise control and timing.

To truly enjoy *Crazy Taxi 3*, you have to be the sort of stubborn player who wants to beat a game for its own sake—there are no giant bonuses for getting good scores, and trust us, getting anything above a "C" grade is truly a Herculean feat. On the other hand, it's great fun just driving around, over, and through the sprawling environments, making it perfect for neophyte gamers.

The problem with *High Roller* is that, despite the addition of the new course, the game plays almost identically to the original. Even the Crazy X minigames seem like rehashes of those we've seen before—and the soundtrack is filled with the same cloying and ear-unfriendly Offspring and Bad Religion songs from the Dreamcast version. *High Roller* is perhaps the best *Crazy Taxi* we've seen; just not by very much. For the hardcore, we can only recommend a rental.

Matt Sammons

Six out of Ten

ROBOTECH: BATTLECRY

Dev : Vicious Cycle
Pub : TDK
Players : 1

Robo: Dreck?
Release : Out Now

Hyped by its publisher TDK as "the first great *Robotech* game," *Robotech: Battlecry* delivers plenty of nostalgia for aging pot-bellied yuppies who grew up watching this action-packed Japanese space opera on TV. But any discriminating gamer knows that nostalgia will only take you so far.

Thankfully, *Battlecry* has gameplay where it counts: in the heat of battle, where you freely transform your Veritech from jet fighter into giant robot (Battloid), or into a weird hybrid of the two (Guardian). Not only are these transformations fantastic to behold, but—here's the kicker—each mode is actually useful depending on the combat situation. Typically, it's best to use the jet fighter for its speed and devastating missile attacks, while changing into a Guardian allows for the versatility of a helicopter with its hover-in-place capability. When things get up-close and personal, it's best to let loose, quick-and-nimble-like, in Battloid form, boosting and circle-strafing around swarms of enemy battle pods.

All of this happens seamlessly and on-the-fly, making *Battlecry* the first 3D mech game where transformations are a crucial part of gameplay. So it's disappointing then, to see developer Vicious Cycle nail the look and feel of a Veritech fighter, only to drop the ball on finer details like graphics, level design, and overall story. Visually, the game is a mix of incredible moments—like when the Veritech unleashes a thick volley of missiles (*avec* pretty contrails) against a swarm of incoming bogeys—and shoddy production values. All too often it's possible to see right through the game's simplistic, pseudo-3D backgrounds and technological limitations (especially during levels that involve aerial and space combat). On the same note, missions don't get much more involved than defend *this*, defeat *that*, or rescue *them*. Simply kicking ass as a Veritech fighter is fun, to be sure, but it doesn't take 40-plus missions for you to realize that it's getting awful repetitive up in here.

Since it offers transformable robots, decent action, and a trendy cel-shaded cartoon look, *Battlecry* will, no doubt, attract the curious—as it should, since this is a good shooter. And yet while *Battlecry* exudes *Robotech* from every pore, it lacks the soul which made the original TV series such a milestone. Without the nostalgia factor working its voodoo on the player, it's unlikely that *Battlecry* will have the impact to singlehandedly spur Harmony Gold to create another *Robotech* offshoot.

We wanted something more.

Che Chou

Six out of Ten

NCAA 2K3

Dev : Visual Concepts Pub : Sega Players : 1 - 4 College : A great six years! Release Date : Out Now

The battle between EA and Sega on the sports game front is developing into a rivalry for the ages. But while their pro football offerings are virtually neck-and-neck, Sega's *NCAA Football 2K3* lingers a step behind EA's *NCAA Football 2003*.

It's not that *NCAA 2K3* doesn't look good. On the contrary, it's a feast for the eyes, with stadium lights twinkling off player helmets and well-designed player models. And *NCAA 2K3's* presentation is actually a slightly superior, thanks to Sega's link with ESPN. The graphics and overlays borrowed from ESPN's *SportsCenter* certainly add a delicious touch of realism to the game.

Unfortunately, it's realism in terms of actual gameplay that *NCAA 2K3* lacks. Much moreso than its older brother, *NFL 2K3, NCAA 2K3* leans towards an arcade feel. Runners can stop and turn on a dime, while blitzers scream into the backfield like earthbound supersonic jets. Some gamers may appreciate that *2K3* isn't a total simulation, but the passing and run games feel almost artificial—due largely to the players lacking any real weight, and their ability to disobey the laws of physics.

As with its professional counterpart, *NFL 2K3, NCAA 2K3* clearly wins the battle of the animation systems...*2K3* is beautiful in motion.

In spite of this, *NCAA 2K3* is certainly a fun game, and has plenty of modes to choose from. The dynasty mode is a treat, and hardcore fans will battle it out in the trenches for better team rankings and a shot at the national title. *NCAA 2K3* is worth checking out, but if you can only afford one college game, *NCAA 2003* offers more bang for the buck.

Dan DiGiacomo

Seven out of Ten

NCAA FOOTBALL 2003

Dev : EA Sports Pub : Electronic Arts Players : 1 - 4 Pigskin: Pleasure Release Date : Out Now

College football may seem like the same game the pros play in the NFL, but rest assured that it's a very different beast. NCAA football has an altogether different feel, with team mascots, school fight songs, and brass bands. EA's *NCAA Football 2003* manages to capture that feel perfectly, and it's perhaps the finest college football game ever made.

While *NCAA 2003* is based on the same engine that makes its older brother *Madden* so great, it's far from a simple imitation. The playbooks capture college ball thrills, including the wishbone formation and the ever-popular option plays. In fact, the gameplay is just about flawless, with both passing and run games well represented. There's also plenty to cheer about with the deep dynasty mode that lets you battle it out for top rankings, bowl berths, and the national championship.

Graphically, *NCAA 2003* sports great player models and animations, along with accurately rendered stadiums. The lighting is also superb, with gorgeous shadowing effects and skies that change hue as day becomes night.

"If winning isn't everything, why do they keep score?" — Vince Lombardi.

NCAA 2003 has a few shortcomings. Season games that aren't designated as televised don't get commentary; instead, a listless stadium PA announcer gives the play-by-play. What's more, every team gets a prestige ranking that makes building a second-rate team into a contender a Herculean task; pulling off upsets is virtually impossible. And yet these are minor complaints. EA's got the college football game of the year.

Dan DiGiacomo

Eight out of Ten

SPLASHDOWN

Dev : Rainbow Studios Pub : Infogrames Players : 1 - 4 Water Sports: h2okay Release Date : Out Now

Rainbow Studios has built a solid reputation for its offroad racing games, which all feature fast, high-flying, arcade-style gameplay spiked with a shot of realistic physics for that extra oomph. *Splashdown* marks the studio's first attempt to recreate the formula with seafaring craft and, as expected, it's solid.

Splashdown made its debut on the PlayStation 2 last year, meeting cheers from critics and sighs of relief from Sony fans itching for a game to match Nintendo's *Wave Race*. *Splashdown* is nearly as pretty as the big N's offering (though not quite), but nowhere near as manically over-the-top. Courses are set in real-world locations such as Venice and the Everglades, but despite the fancy window dressing, there's no doubt that the real star of the show is *Splashdown*'s gorgeously rendered water, which ripples and shimmers even more realistically than it did on the PS2.

As cool as it looks, the water provides more than just graphical flash. Players must learn to use the Xbox' analog control to its fullest if they plan to avoid getting tossed from their Sea-Doos by oncoming waves. Beating the game entirely requires the player to learn how to hydroplane for extra speed, and how to lean into turns properly without spinning out of control.

An *SSX*-style trick system is also included, but races are mostly won on flat-out steering skill.

Our biggest gripe with *Splashdown* lies with its all-too-realistic and slightly bland course design, which makes for repetitive gameplay. *Splashdown* lacks the imagination and polish of *Wave Race*, but it's enjoyable nonetheless.

Matt Sammons

Seven out of Ten

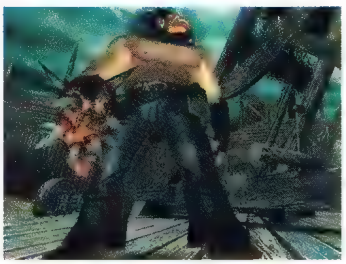
ENCLAVE

Dev : Starbreeze Studios Games Pub : Conspiracy Games Players : 1 Release Date : Out Now

***Enclave* had the makings of a classy swords-'n'-sorcery actioneer. Look! Twenty-plus levels and 10-plus character types! Shields, scimitars, crossbows, healing potions, and steel brassieres! Magic! Lava! Yet beneath *Enclave's* pixel-shaded graphics, we find only a trace of a game worth playing.**

From the very beginning, *Enclave* is frustrating. Enemies kill you with a few hits if you're not outfitted properly, and if you die—even by simply missing a single jump—you're forced to restart the current level from the beginning. Perhaps our basic humanity has gone horribly awry, but we'd like to see you hang onto your composure the 10th time you're killed by a near-invisible falling barrel some 30 minutes into one of these levels. Mid-level checkpoints would have helped but, sadly, are nonexistent.

And for all the hoopla, there are really only a few types of armaments: melee weapons, which the player swings in simple three-hit-combo patterns; arrows and crossbows, which can be used *Max Payne*-style to shoot projectiles from long range; and magic staffs, which all produce variants on your basic fireball. The resultant combat becomes a repetitive button-mashing slash-fest with optional first-person sniping.



Hefty, strapping, shirtless Rod went out clubbing last night. Get it? Clubbing!? Bah.

Secretly, we suspect *Enclave* was released a bit early—the bland cinematics, ridiculous enemy AI, and questionable user interface all hint at a game that was rushed out the door. In the name of...what? Quarterly results?

Matt Sammons

Five out of Ten

GUN METAL

Dev : Rage Software Pub : Majesco Players : 1 - 4 Gun: Not Fun Release Date : Out Now

Gun Metal has had a rather unique effect on game critics, sending them into a frenzy of "more than meets the eye" quips, Optimus Prime puns, and more references to _Robotech_ than any one human can shake a MS-09F Dom Tropen Gundam suit at. Unfortunately, however, the game's title perhaps best describes the taste left in one's mouth after playing it than anything else.

Players strap themselves into a combat mech that can transform itself into an elaborate, futuristic jet with the push of a button. The planet has been threatened by hordes of enemies who are not only obsessed with world domination, but also seem to have developed a fetish for cattle herds. Through 25 mission scenarios, the game delivers all the stomping, blasting, and Mach 3 combat one would expect, except it's done in such lackluster fashion that most players will quickly start sounding like Han Solo with their repeated cries of, "How long before the fun begins?"

The graphics are, at best, passable. The Xbox' resources have not been tapped in the least; if machines could get bored with simplistic rendering, this would put the console to sleep. The controls are passable, while sound effects and music are merely adequate. Even the game's good points (interactive environments, diverse enemies, intense weaponry) aren't enough; for a game in a genre firmly based in that which goes whiz and bang, there's a suspicious shortage of both.

Gun Metal supports ripping CDs to replace the soundtrack with better music. Sadly, it does not allow you to replace the game itself.

Russ Garbutt

Five out of Ten

BRUCE LEE: QUEST OF THE DRAGON

Dev : Ronin Pub : Universal Interactive Players : 1 Enter: The Slaggin' Release Date : Out Now

After a spirited round of the dung-pile-disguised-as-a-DVD _Bruce Lee: Quest of the Dragon_, one supposes the executors of Lee's estate have embarked on a quest of their own—to find a more spacious coffin that Lee's corpse may properly roll over in.

Martial arts master Lee deserves better than the bug-riddled fighter _Quest of the Dragon_. In truth, it can be said that Adolf Hitler and Vlad the Impaler also deserve better than _Dragon_. In combat, Lee loudly clucks like a chicken, the hideous noise like hydrochloric acid on the eardrums. His foes drop currency when defeated, which reduces our hero to a mere coin collector. The twin albatrosses of slowdown and mediocre graphics loom large over _Dragon_, and shoddy programming allows for honest-to-dreadfulness crashes. It's possible for the player as Lee to pummel an opponent past the many invisible barriers the game sets up so that the foe is unreachable—at which point the on-permanent-vacation AI ensures said enemy moves not one polygonal muscle. The player's only recourse, aside from issuing a torrent of obscenity to make a sailor blush, is an angry reset.

Quest of the Dragon: We played it so you don't have to.

Because the dead equine that is _Dragon_ deserves still more beating, it should also be noted that the camera allows background scenery to obscure the fighting action, the one-on-one boss battles are as graceful as a three-legged dog, and the ultimate fight pits Lee against a man in a bowler. Enough said.

Greg Orlando

Two out of Ten

PRISONER OF WAR

Dev : Wide Games Pub: Codemasters Players : 1 Achtung!: Bitte! Release Date : Out Now

As Captain Lewis Stone, an Air Corps pilot in World War II, you're shot down and captured behind German lines. Your mission is both simple and complex: Escape.

Prisoner of War uses a number of familiar elements, most notably an overhead map _á la Metal Gear Solid_ which shows not only the guards, but also their "cones of visibility" as you attempt to evade them. However, you have no weapons at all, and Solid Snake never had to get back in his barracks for morning and evening roll call.

It all gels into a tense, enjoyable whole, although it does suffer from a mild case of "Good Enough Syndrome." You know: Is the animation a little jerky? Well, it's good enough. Is the control a little sticky? Well, it's good enough. Is the atmosphere often more _Hogan's Heroes_ than _The Great Escape?_ Well… you get the idea. Also, in addition to these tiny (if numerous) annoyances, the game is broken up into five levels, each set in a different camp. This means that escape is usually "rewarded" by being recaptured and sent to a new (and even tougher) compound. While both realistic and a standard gaming structure, it's also somewhat self-defeating.

Where's General George S. Patton when you need him?

The combination of WWII setting and emphasis on stealth is almost unique, and it remains a satisfying (if difficult) challenge for both brains and reflexes. The simple fact that one can play through the whole of _Prisoner_ without killing a single enemy is itself deserving of applause. Had it cooked a bit longer, however, this could have been a classic.

Jeff Lundrigan

Seven out of Ten

JEDI STARFIGHTER

Dev : Secret Level Pub : LucasArts Players : 1 - 2 Better : Than Expected Release Date : Out Now

Look up "inconsistent" in a dictionary and you'll no doubt find an entry on LucasArts' _Star Wars_ games. Sometimes, they're great. Other times, they're heaps of bantha dung gussied up with the familiar logo that nearly guarantees a hit.

Jedi Starfighter leans towards the former group. This PlayStation 2 port looks good and plays well, as tons of spacecraft zooming through the field of vision with not a second of slowdown to speak of. Within _Star Wars_ continuity, it takes place shortly before _Episode II: Attack of the Clones_ and splits its focus between the exploits of Jedi Adi Gallia and Nym, leader of a renegade group tussling with the vile Trade Federation. When piloting as Adi, you're behind the wheel of the prototype Jedi Starfighter, controlling four Force powers that let you partake in cool Jedi stunts like throwing lightning at oncoming ships. The Force powers add a unique gameplay element to a relatively simple shooter, and come in handy during the game's harrowing latter missions. The missions are well paced and vary between dogfights, assaults on large craft, and land-based seek-and-destroy operations. What's more, every mission can be played with a friend via a split-screen co-op mode.

We like this game because it is smooth, and not coarse and rough like sand.

Sadly, _Starfighter_ weighs in a tad too light, and can be readily explored in a long weekend. There is some replay value in the form of unlockable missions and craft—including the venerable X-Wing, TIE Fighter, and Slave I. Still, it's worth taking for a spin.

Dan DiGiacomo

Seven out of Ten

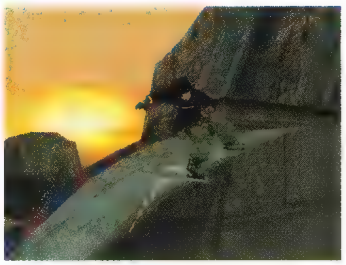
AGGRESSIVE INLINE

Dev : Z-Axis Pub : AKA Acclaim Players : 1- 4 Kick Ass: Make Games Release Date : Out Now

Do you feel that most of the extreme sports games on the market lack sufficient "ass-kicking" attitude? Well, Acclaim aims to change that with Athletes Kick Ass, its hip 'n' edgy sports line that promises to blend panty shots, aggressive attitude and painfully obvious *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* mimicry into something palatable.

Noble? No. Effective? Perhaps.

As the first AKA title, *Aggressive Inline* doesn't disappoint; it's a competent *THPS* clone with a few nifty twists to set it apart from the pack. The most impressive element of the game is its level design: The enormous locales allow for hours of exploration and trickery. The grind game improves on *THPS* by enabling skaters to easily link a ridiculous number of grind combos seamlessly. Tricks can be linked by using manuals, grinds, and cess slides (reverts) for big points. Also, an Action Button enables you to vault over benches, swing on poles, and talk to jerks who have secrets to tell you, adding a surprisingly enjoyable adventure element.



The skaters look realistic—if not amazing—and one of them even has sagging pants. (What in the world? Pull your pants up, young man!)

The RPG-like skill-meter is dependent upon your skating; spin a lot and your spin ability increases, bail on all your grinds, your meter will diminish; it's a seemingly simple addition, but one which adds to the depth of the game. And instead of a clock, *Inline* uses a Juice Meter, which stays primed by performing tricks to determine session length—which is a nice alternative to repeated two-minute sessions.

Nate Denver

Seven out of Ten

SEGA SOCCER SLAM

Dev : Black Box Pub : Sega Players : 1 - 4 Soccer : Slammed Release Date : Out Now

Sega Soccer Slam* is stupid. Really stupid. The brainchildren at Sega surely thought to themselves what many historical greats have pondered: *What this world needs is a soccer videogame where the players can light themselves on fire.

Wrong.

The world's videogame players require this monstrosity like they need an extra hemorrhoid, a tattoo of child actor Emmanuel Lewis on their buttocks, and the director's cut of *The Adventures of Ford Fairlaine*. *Soccer Slam* is a weak attempt to capitalize on ESPN's hip-hopping, in-your-facing of sports; where a good play isn't TV-worthy unless it concludes with finger pointing or, well, turning your opponent into a roasted marshmallow.

The action here is dull and—from Sega's standpoint—unimportant. *Soccer Slam* is all about look, the ultimate expression of style over substance. The teams are called El Fuego (In Spanish: "The Fire") and Toxic and Subzero; though they appear to possess different inclinations in terms of play style, any

It's yet another wacky sports game. Play it while they pump you full of Thorazine in the institution.

variations among the teams are more cosmetic than tangible. The players are steroid-enhanced mutants with neon shirts and steel chins. Sure, the three-on-three matches, flashy graphics, and goofy play will hold your interest. But only for 22 seconds, until you realize that winning requires not one iota of skill, and that your favorite episode of *Mama's Family* is on in the other room.

Jeff Pearlman

Two out of Ten

MATT HOFFMAN'S PRO BMX 2

Dev : Rainbow Studios Pub : Activision Players : 1 - 4 Daily : Grind Release Date : Out Now

Simply put, the original *Matt Hoffman's Pro BMX* had a lot of problems. Activision handed the sequel off to Rainbow Studios, and the result is a 99 percent improvement in every area you can imagine—and one, big new problem.

To begin with, the somewhat unwieldy trick scheme of the original has been retooled so that it's much more in line with the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* model, and *Hawk* veterans should have little trouble adjusting and begin stringing together trick lines (including those of the flatland variety) in no time. The courses are all appreciably large and amazingly well designed. Almost everywhere you look you're going to see something that gets you thinking, "Hmm, if I grind over this I can hop over there and manual over that..."

This does, however, bring up the game's one real problem. You open up new levels by completing challenges and earning "road trip points" to spend on new courses. However, many of these challenges are either ridiculously hard or painfully obscure. Also, because of the sheer size of the levels, simply

Matt Hoffman gets a new developer for his BMX game, yet another check, and a solid review from *Xbox Nation*.

finding that elusive last gap to jump or miscellaneous object to collect is often a real chore. The result of all this is that opening new levels is a painfully slow process, and one often fraught with unnecessary frustration.

Which is a shame, because otherwise this is a real gem. The reality is that only those with a tremendous amount of talent and perseverance are ever going to see much of it.

Jeff Lundrigan

Seven out of Ten

MLB SLUGFEST 20-03

Dev : Midway Pub : Midway Players : 1 - 2 Base : Brawl Release Date : Out Now

In the middle of a boring game between the Chicago Cubs and Kansas City Royals, Jimmy, *MLB Slugfest 20-03's* color commentator, asks Tim, the play-by-play analyst, the following question: "You ever eat pig knuckles?" To which Tim responds: "No, I haven't. But they sound tasty."

The first time you hear this, it is funny. The 18th time you hear this, you will be running around the house with underwear covering your head, screaming. Such is life with *Slugfest*, a promising effort that—after a moderate number of plays—will drive the levelheaded to the brink of insanity.

In a nutshell, this game tries way too hard to capitalize on the infantile ESPN/Fox Sports vision of modern day athletics, where everything is a funky graphic, a moderately unfunny quip, and a highlight of some steroid-enhanced freakoid either smoking a 450-foot home run or beating the crap out of a scrawny Grade-D pitcher.

In *MLB Slugfest*, hot hitters literally catch on fire (Get it?), 106-mph fastballs are trailed by a glowing-red

Sadly, the good things get buried here. The graphics are fantastic, and most of the stadiums are accurately detailed. Plus, there are brawls.

streak, infielders can—without provocation—beat the crap out of baserunners, catchers do the Ali Shuffle (don't ask), announcers rip on Ally McBeal and large-chested hotties make for random window dressing.

Put it all together, and what do you get? Stupid. Unless your IQ is below 17, there are better ways to waste your day.

Like drooling.

Jeff Pearlman

Five out of Ten

DAVID BECKHAM SOCCER

Dev : Rage Pub : Majesco Players : 1 - 4 Soccer: Slammed (part 2) Release Date : Out Now

There's something so authentic about *David Beckham Soccer*—the British announcers, the foreign stadiums, the fan chants. Most impressive, partaking in this version of video soccer is extraordinarily similar to watching the real stuff on TV. In fact, save for some minor details, it could be the real stuff.

If the real stuff was boring and stunk.

The bald-headed Beckham is one of his sport's most dazzling figures. He's even married to Victoria Adams, AKA Posh Spice. Anyone who shags a Spice Girl should be able to come up with more interesting stuff than this. Neat graphics. A "Kick Mel C. In The Head" exhibition. Anything.

David Beckham Soccer is as stale as a loaf of '86 rye; as mind-numbing as Donny Osmond's autobiography. It's also unintentionally silly. Because the game has no licensing rights, you won't recognize—by name at least—any of your favorite nation's players. Although the characters are easy to control (but waaay too small), and the team strengths are mostly accurate, the action is dull. Despite sporting a sports-bag full of features, World Cup mode, Survival Mode (where you must beat a succession of teams—oh wait, that's just *every* tournament isn't it?), and various Challenge modes, including the psychologically revealing "Beat Brazil." *Soccer*'s labored pass-pass-pass again-shoot-mechanics quickly turn England's so-called "Beautiful Game" into something less inspiring. Like Sporty Spice.

Teeny, tiny players inhabit the world of *David Beckham Soccer*.

Jeff Pearlman

Four out of Ten

CHASE: HOLLYWOOD STUNT DRIVER

Dev : I-Imagine Pub : Bam! Players : 1 - 2 Chase it : With a better game Release Date : Out Now

Although obviously meant to mine the same vein as *Stuntman* for PlayStation 2, *Chase: Hollywood Stunt Driver* isn't quite the blockbuster one might have hoped for. Following the adventures of stuntwoman Chase Corrada (the box copy hyperbolically describes her as "the bravest woman alive"), the game is divided into four "movies," each of which features four "scenes" to drive through. Each scene has several different goals—perform a certain number of barrel rolls, smash up a certain number of background objects, etc—which earn "reputation points" that open up new scenes.

While a competent effort and reasonably enjoyable, overall very little about the game stands out. The graphics are relatively bland, and there's no real sense of speed while driving. And, odd for a game about movies, there's no actual storyline to speak of (Chase is occasionally taunted by a rival stuntman, but it's never explained why), and there isn't a hint of character; Chase herself remains a mute cypher.

The controls are fairly responsive, but since you can attempt each scene as many times as you wish, there's little tension or motivation to get that "perfect take." (Although, since in some scenes certain goals are mutually exclusive, that's just as well.) Lastly, the replay of each scene—which should at least *resemble* a movie—often misses important events. *Chase* makes a decent diversion for a lazy afternoon or two, but it's strictly direct-to-video.

Although it would seem to be a natural feature to include, there's no means to edit the replays of different takes together.

Jeff Lundrigan

Six out of Ten

MIKE TYSON HEAVYWEIGHT BOXING

Dev : Atomic Planet Pub : Codemasters Players : 1-2 Heavyweight: Chump Release Date : Out Now

One might expect a boxing game starring Mike Tyson to prove something like a circus train wreck. After all, Tyson is a jail-hardened rapist, maniacal ear-biter and all-around nut. A game that plays up his absurd persona could be a real guilty pleasure; instead, Codemasters offers a lukewarm boxing title with nary a hint of Tyson's true presence.

You can spar against big Mike in the gym, but facing him in the ring for real demands massive play time commitment. (Quell your hopes of playing as the surly former champ—it takes eons to unlock him.) So, without much Tyson to go around, what's left? Nothing at all noteworthy.

The boxers' character models look fairly snazzy, if a bit cartoony, but the arenas and crowd look like they wandered in from some budget PlayStation title. There's an attempt to offer a complex pugilistic simulation with 12 different punches, but all of those moves aren't necessary. It's easy to simply circle strafe around your opponents while jamming on the buttons—and this method ensures plenty of knockouts.

Why?

Recovering from a knockdown is similarly ambitious, as you have to input a long string of *PaRappa*-like button presses in order to rouse your warrior. It's damn tricky, so you'll face the specter of "game over" every time you hit the mat. The deep create-a-boxer mode is the only aspect of the game that truly excels, but one good feature doesn't even out a sub-standard title.

Shane Bettenhausen

Four out of Ten

KELLY SLATER'S PRO SURFER

Dev : Treyarch Pub : Activision Players : 1 - 2 Surf: Nazis Must Die! Release Date : Out Now

Activision and surfmeister Kelly Slater aim to please with *Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer,* which sports tons of real beaches, pro surfers, licensed equipment, and some pseudo-intellectual video musings from Slater on the inner meaning of the sport. The water here looks damn fine (remarkably better than the aquatic mess of the PlayStation 2 version) and the soundtrack sports cool hip-hop beats and island rhythms instead of the me-too punk/pop most "xtreme" games usually crank out.

Surfer dudes and dudettes will be in tubular heaven; if you're part of the other 99 percent of the population, however, you might want to stay out of the water. *Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer* is *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* goes to the ocean, so the goal layout, trick system, and control setup will be eerily familiar to anyone who's ever played a *Pro Skater* game. It's time-tested, intuitive gameplay, but it doesn't work nearly as well on a surfboard. Due to the nature of the sport, you'll wipe out really often, which really chops up the smooth flow of the game.

Not only is surfing fun and exciting, it's also a good way to simultaneously impress the ladies and avoid having to shower.

Also, since all of the levels are just bodies of water, there isn't much variety in terms of locales or goals. You won't go racing through an airport or across a crowded city street…you will, however, surf on lots and lots of water. It's the curse of making a reasonable, realistic surfing game—it just doesn't offer a very compelling videogame experience.

Shane Bettenhausen

Five out of Ten

LEGENDS OF WRESTLING

Dev : Acclaim Pub : Acclaim Players : 1 - 2 Wrasslemania: The Geriatric Years Release Date : Out Now

Gather now the sweaty, spandex-clad behemoths of yore for the smashmouth *Legends of Wrestling*. Look upon Acclaim's wrassling works, ye mighty, and behold the cartoonish character renderings, the problematic camera that shows tag-team matches from a fixed perspective 8.6 miles away from the action, and the surprisingly fine grappling system that allows grapplers to cheat like mad, and even knock a ref insensate. With a fine crop of cool old-skool grapplers and a salvageable career mode, this is as good as wrestling gets on the Xbox.

Greg Orlando

Six

TOTALED!

Dev : Rage Software Pub : Majesco Players : 1-4 Dear Rage: Fewer Games Release Date : Out Now

Sluggish control, buggy physics, and a camera system that acts like it was damaged in a multi-car pileup mar Rage Software's new destruction derby title…to the point of being an exercise in sheer frustration. Players compete to find out if they can outrun, out stunt, and smash into scrap a high number of opponent vehicles before the clock runs out. The best thing one can do with one of these vehicles, however, is "jump the shark"—as popularized by Fonzie on *Happy Days*; that's exactly what both Rage and Majesco have done with this title.

Russ Garbutt

Four

REDCARD SOCCER 20-03

Dev : Midway Pub : Midway Players : 1 - 4 Soccer : 2 tha Xtreme Release Date : Out Now

It's soccer. It's Midway. It's got a team comprised of soccer-playing dolphins, and another comprised of soccer-playing penguins. When you do lots of good things, your players become "on fire". Natch.

While *Redcard* clearly falls on the arcade side of the fence, its gameplay leans a bit closer to simulation than itz counterpartz *Blitz* and *Hitz*. Not quite as polished as Midway's other (peudo-)sports titles, but an entertaining weekend diversion nonetheless. We should also note that the beautiful grass texture made us feel all outdoorsy and sexy.

Evan Shamoon

Five

TAZ : WANTED

Dev : Blitz Games Pub : Infogames Players : 1 - 2 Looney: Tune In, Turn On, Taz Out Release Date : Out Now

"Why for you drown Taz?" Play *Taz: Wanted* and you'll come to hear this comic quip in your dreams, and by dreams we mean nightmares. *Wanted* brings the *Looney Tunes* bit player Tasmanian Devil into the spotlight for an action platformer that's gorgeously cel shaded, sharp, and smart, but ultimately too difficult for the game's intended audience and certainly a little too generous in its repetition of sound samples. Get past that, and what's left is some tasty, tasty pap with simple Saturday morning fun and puzzle-solving elements.

Greg Orlando

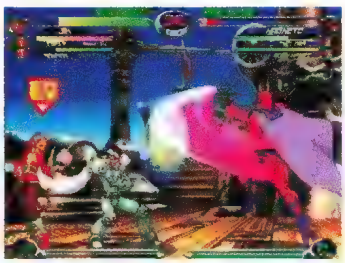
Seven

MARVEL VS. CAPCOM 2

Dev : Capcom Pub : Capcom Players : 1 - 2 Marvel: At What? Release Date : Out Now

For years we've surrendered our hard-earned lunch money for the love of Capcom's fighting games. In return, instead of offering Xbox owners something fresh, the once and future King of Fighting Game developers serves us up a stale and astoundingly pixelated port of a two-year-old Dreamcast game. The only thing that saved our copy from being flung into a tire-fire is its faithfulness to the original arcade game—which is, and always has been, a solid, combo-crazy variant on the *Street Fighter* formula. Unless Xbox is your only console, however, don't buy this one.

Matt Sammons



Three

OUTLAW GOLF

Dev : Hypnotix Pub : Simon & Schuster Players : 1 - 4 S : and M Release Date : Out Now

Young fleshpot Summer, her tightly packaged video buttocks prominently displayed, is … ahem … performing her version of *Pole Position* on the backyard nine. Truly, this is the way golf was meant to be played: with degenerates who make white trash goddess Anna Nicole Smith seem like a debutante, caddy pummeling, and a host of unlockable goodies. Oh, and to hell with Mark Twain who quipped that golf was a good walk ruined—*Outlaw Golf* can be played and thoroughly enjoyed on the couch.

Greg Orlando

Seven

NFL BLITZ 20-03

Dev : Midway Pub : Midway Players : 1 - 2 It's ba- : - aaack Release Date : Out Now

Blitz, the goofy football game with the easy-to-master controls and excessive violence, is back for its fifth incarnation—which prompts us to issue the following exclamation: *whoopedydoo*. This version is exactly what we've come to expect from the series...the same damn thing with slightly better graphics and a new create-a-player mode that would've been very exciting in 1992. Though this is the newest and best-looking *Blitz* available, *20-03* is only recommended for those who don't already own one of the game's previous iterations.

Matt Sammons

Six

TETRIS WORLDS

Dev : Radical Entertainment Pub : THQ Players : 1 - 2 Get a : Game Boy Release Date : Out Now

A rather uneventful remix of the most popular game of all time, *Tetris Worlds* takes the same plummeting seven blocks and tarts them up with ambient dance music, candy colors, and a bizarre storyline involving a civilization of "Tetrions." The five new play modes—Fusion, Square, Hot-Line, Cascade, Sticky—actually make the game less challenging, and the murky gray background makes it hard to see the blocks. The biggest disappointment is the game's multiplayer mode; there's no way to send blocks or any manner of taunts to your opponent. For shame.

Raina Lee

Four

XRATED
Smart Reviews

REWIND

Our past reviews in an easy to swallow gel-tab

Like those Time/Life "hits" CDs you can only buy on TV, *XBN* presents all its past reviews.

Top five games from *XBN* #3

1 World Series Baseball
If realism is the ultimate goal of the game maker, then *World Series Baseball* is the Mona Lisa of games.
XBN Rating Nine out of Ten

2 Hunter: The Reckoning
Despite its rough edges, *Hunter: The Reckoning* is an early contender for dark horse of the year.
XBN Rating Eight out of Ten

3 Rallisport Challenge
Out of nowhere, what seems like a passionless toil becomes a red-hot race.
XBN Rating Eight out of Ten

4 Moto GP
Moto GP is a game that has the potential to satisfy both gear-heads and a good chunk of wannabe bikers alike.
XBN Rating Eight out of Ten

5 Blood Omen II
If you want a cold, ruthless, and bloodthirsty antihero to keep you busy for 15-20 hours, Kain fits the bill.
XBN Rating Seven out of Ten

Air Force Delta Storm
[illegible]
XBN Rating Four out of Ten

Burnout
[illegible]
XBN Rating Seven out of Ten

ESPN NFL Primetime
[illegible]
XBN Rating Three out of Ten

All-Star Baseball 2003
[illegible]
XBN Rating Four out of Ten

Cel Damage
[illegible]
XBN Rating Five out of Ten

ESPN NBA 2 NIGHT
Dev: Konami Pub: Konami
It's got all the requisi[illegible]
XBN Rating Five out of Ten

Amped: Snowboarding
[illegible]
XBN Rating Six out of Ten

Circus Maximus
[illegible]
XBN Rating Five out of Ten

ESPN Snowboarding
[illegible]
XBN Rating Four out of Ten

Arctic Thunder
[illegible]
XBN Rating Five out of Ten

Crash Bandicoot
[illegible]
XBN Rating Six out of Ten

Fuzion Frenzy
Dev: Blitz Games Pub: Microsoft
The 45 goofball subgames [illegible]
XBN Rating Six out of Ten

Azurik: Rise of Perathia
[illegible]
XBN Rating Three out of Ten

Dark Summit
[illegible]
XBN Rating Five out of Ten

Gauntlet: Dark Legacy
[illegible]
XBN Rating Six out of Ten

Batman: Vengeance
Dev: Ubi Soft Montreal Pub: Ubi Soft
[illegible]
XBN Rating Five out of Ten

Dave Mirra's BMX 2
Dev: 2-Axis Pub: Acclaim
[illegible]
XBN Rating Five out of Ten

Genma Onimusha
Dev: Capcom [illegible]
[illegible]
XBN Rating Seven out of Ten

Blitz 20-02
[illegible]
XBN Rating Seven out of Ten

Dead or Alive 3
[illegible]
XBN Rating Seven out of Ten

GunValkyrie
[illegible]
XBN Rating Seven out of Ten

Blood Wake
[illegible]
XBN Rating Six out of Ten

ESPN MLS ExtraTime 2002
Dev: Konami Pub: Konami
[illegible] extreme [illegible]
XBN Rating Four out of Ten

HALO
Dev: Bungie Pub: Microsoft
Halo is not only the best Xbox game available, but also one of the finest [illegible]
XBN Rating Ten out of Ten

Jet Set Radio Future
Dev: Smilebit Pub: Sega
Maintains the carefree charisma of the original, and provides a beautiful escape from violent competition. Joyous.
XBN Rating Eight out of Ten

NBA Inside Drive
Dev: High Voltage Pub: Microsoft
A solid first attempt—and easily the most visually polished hoops game ever made—but still second-rate. Maybe next season?
XBN Rating Six out of Ten

Shrek
Dev: Dice Pub: Dreamworks
The graphics are shiny and pretty, while the game is nothing to write home about. It has its moments, but our six was very generous.
XBN Rating Six out of Ten

THPS 2X
Dev: Neversoft/Treyarch Pub: Activision 02
Do yourself a favor and play this with the Controller S rather than the clunky Xbox pad, as that will make all the difference.
XBN Rating Six out of Ten

Knockout Kings 2002
Dev: Blck Ops Pub: EA
Forget the whole notion of *Knockout Kings* existing as a boxing simulation; any such idea is shattered with this year's go-round.
XBN Rating Six out of Ten

NBA 2K2
Dev: Visual Concepts Pub: Sega
The finest basketball game we've played. If *Live* wasn't quite your cup of tea, have sip of this and *enjoy*.
XBN Rating Nine out of Ten

Simpsons Road Rage
Dev: Radical Pub: EA
Swipes *Crazy Taxi* right outta Sega's back pocket. *Road Rage* lacks any sort of rage whatsoever. And it also lacks fun.
XBN Rating Four out of Ten

Transworld Surf
Dev: Atari/Angel Studios Pub: Infogrames
Quite simply, this lacks the blissful control and perfectly-realized feel of extreme counterparts *SSX* and *THPS3*.
XBN Rating Three out of Ten

Madden NFL 2002
Dev: EA Sports Pub: EA Sports
While *Madden*'s depth is a surprise to no one, it's not as fun as its more joypad friendly competition (*Fever* and *NFL 2K2*).
XBN Rating Seven out of Ten

NFL Fever
Dev: Microsoft Pub: Microsoft
Microsoft has created a football game that plays realistically while maintaining a tight flow and, most importantly, looks very nice.
XBN Rating Eight out of Ten

Spider-Man
Dev: Treyarch Pub: Activision
Spider-Man, as rendered by Treyarch, really does whatever a spider can. And that's quite a feat.
XBN Rating Seven out of Ten

UFC Tapout
Dev: Dream Factory Pub: Crave
Better than the original *UFC* on the Dreamcast—but not by much. *UFC* feels like yet another pretender to throne.
XBN Rating Five out of Ten

Munch's Oddysee
Dev: Oddworld Inhabitants Pub: Microsoft
Odd and repetitive, but ultimately satisfying. Reverts to several video game clichés, but the PS2's loss is certainly the Xbox' gain.
XBN Rating Eight out of Ten

NHL Hitz 2002
Dev: Black Box Pub: Midway
Hitz combines naked agression and fast-paced play that simulates hockey without recreating it.
XBN Rating Six out of Ten

SSX Tricky
Dev: EA Canada Pub: EA
SSX Tricky is something you pick up and never again have much desire to put back down. A near-classic.
XBN Rating Eight out of Ten

WWF Raw
Dev: Anchor Pub: THC
Raw could not be more aptly named. It's a work-in-progress that doesn't provide half as much meat as it does flash and spectacle.
XBN Rating Five out of Ten

NASCAR Heat
Dev: MGI Pub: Infogrames
XBN Rating Five out of Ten

Nightcaster
Dev: VR1 Pub: Microsoft
Bad sound samples and uninspired play damn this game to the island of misfit titles. Cast a spell of forgetfulness on this one.
XBN Rating Four out of Ten

Star Wars: Starfighter
Dev: Secret Level Pub: LucasArts
The action's fast, the graphics are okay, the enemies are many, but be forewarned: there's very little to challenge you.
XBN Rating Five out of Ten

2002 FIFA World Cup
Dev: Electronic arts Pub: Electronic Arts
While it may not be the deepest around, *FIFA* is just plain fun. And, in the final analysis, that goes a long way.
XBN Rating Seven out of Ten

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AD INDEX

Acclaim Entertainment	www.acclaim.com	29, 51
Acclaim Entertainment	www.acclaim.com	52-53
Bam Entertainment	www.bam4fun.com	24-25
Blockbuster Entertainment	www.blockbuster.com	136
Eidos Interactive, Inc	www.eidos.com	2-3, 14-15
Full Sail Real World	www.fullsail.com	133
Infogrames, Inc.	www.infogrames.net	4-5, 12-13, 34-35, 44-45, 70-71
MAJESCO SALES, INC.	www.majescosales.com	41
MICROSOFT	www.xbox.com	27, 75
MIDWAY HOME ENTERTAINMENT	www.midway.com	11, 42-43, 134-135
NAMCO HOMETEK	www.namco.com	62-63
Phantagram Interactive	www.phantomcrash.net	23
Sega Of America Dreamcast	www.sega.com	6-7, 36-37, 54-55, 61
TDK Mediactive	www.tdk-mediactive.com	31
Tecmo Inc.	www.tecmoinc.com	47, 69
THQ	www.thq.com	88-89
US ARMY	www.goarmy.com	81
Vivendi Universal Games Inc.	www.universalinteractive.com	18-19, 32-33
Vivendi Universal Games Inc.-PPG	www.interplay.com	49, 64-65
Vivendi Universal Games Inc.-PPG	www.conspiracygames.com	82-83
Wizards of the Coast	www.wizards.com	21

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XTRA

Out of the Box

Safe

Welcome to another edition of Xbox Nation's famed Xtra section. This month, we've tracked down Sega legend Yu Suzuki for a candid interview regarding the release of *Shenmue II* for Xbox. Spin is also back, with reviews of the DVDs and CDs which moved us this month, while Inbox includes our responses to the cries of our loyal readership. Next issue: *XBN* compiles a list of every single bullet and/or laser beam ever fired in a videogame. Send calculators and extra fingers.

Inside Xtra

126 Yu Suzuki
Space Harrier, OutRun, Virtua Fighter. Xbox Nation chats with one of the Earth's finest game designers.

130 Spin
Push Button Objects, Battle Royale, Lee Perry, and more. *XBN*'s picks of the month.

132 Inbox
You write letters, we attempt to write funny responses.

SAFE AT ANY SPEED

Yu made who? Sega's legendary designer/visionary Yu Suzuki brings his *Shenmue II* to Microsoft's Xbox — and *Xbox Nation* is there for the full scoop

Yu Suzuki is a happy man. Known affectionately as "Yu-san" to his cohorts, he is dressed in his trademark jeans, T-shirt, and U.S.-logo jacket. As he enters the room, he is smiling, jovial, and relaxed.

The walls of his office are covered with framed photos of Suzuki posing with entertainment legends: an arm around Steven Spielberg, a mock-fight with Michael Jackson. His lair is a curious mixture of retro and cutting edge—a giant, framed, Renaissance-style portrait of a young girl covers the wall facing his oak desk, and behind the desk lies a dizzying array of surround sound, video, and studio equipment.

Xbox Nation: Why don't we kick off with you telling us the exact nature of your involvement with the *Shenmue II* Xbox project?

Yu Suzuki: I run the AM2 software studio. I'm also a senior corporate vice president of Sega of Japan, and general manager of software development at Sega. A bit like [Shigeru] Miyamoto at Nintendo—I'm in charge of software development for the firm as a whole, and I report to [Tetsuo] Kayama-san, Sega's chief executive. I'm also generally overseeing progress on this [version of] *Shenmue II*.

XBN: What kind of relationship does AM2 have now with Sega and Microsoft? What's changed since AM2 became independent?

Suzuki: We're still 100 percent owned by Sega. On paper, the main difference is that we're now individually accountable for our profits. That means we have to be even more prudent with where we put our R+D money!

The main change as I see it though, is that the people working here now feel unique in terms of the culture at AM2. They feel part of a special community that is AM2. It's the biggest, and best change in my opinion.

XBN: What's your relationship with Microsoft? Can you decide which games to bring to Xbox yourself?

Suzuki: This is a slightly political issue. We need to keep all three major players happy: Sony, Nintendo, and Microsoft. We look at each title and decide where it's going based on certain features—what unique aspects of the hardware the game will need, for example. If it needs a hard disk or Ethernet, we'll look at Xbox. If we want to aim the game at a younger market, we might target Gamecube. If it's a premier, high-cost development we might want to recoup our investment on PlayStation 2. Basically, we try to keep everyone happy and base games around their target demographics.

XBN: How does the Xbox version of *Shenmue II* differ from the Dreamcast version? People who played the game at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) complained that it didn't seem very enhanced.

Suzuki: The idea was just to bring the experience of *Shenmue II* to North American players for the first time. The game itself was complete on Dreamcast. Nevertheless, we fully re-did the English voice-overs —that was a big change, we re-recorded everything. Sound quality and dramatic effects are much better. You can also take pictures and save them to the hard drive. [*Motions to the director, who is playing the game.*] See if you can find a pretty girl to snap. Actually, let me try myself.

XBN: You seem to know where all the pretty girls are by heart.

Suzuki: I do! Anyway, there you go. I can save this photo. Other cosmetic effects include having a number of filters which change the entire image as you play. The graphics themselves haven't been improved dramatically, but we have upgraded some textures, water effects, and such. You can also keep up to 10 save files now, and some of the characters have also been tweaked.

XBN: How have some characters been tweaked?

Suzuki: We have a gay character in the Japanese version called Ewan. We removed him for the American version.

XBN: Why?

Suzuki: We're not sure how well it would go down with players outside Japan. We changed the character to a woman.

XBN: Do you think U.S. gamers aren't ready for a gay character?

Suzuki: Maybe. Anyway, he was sort of camp and we're not sure about his whole representation.

XBN: I see.

Suzuki: There are also lots of Quick-Time Events, as in the Dreamcast version. I like the variety of these.

XBN: Do you think that game producers these days are spending too much time on non-interactive story sequences in games?

Suzuki: By and large, you're probably right. I think there's a good balance in a game like *Shenmue*, though. I admit it was difficult for *Shenmue*, as I originally wrote the entire series as a linear story. The ultimate non-interactive media is, of course film, but I think the *Shenmue* movie complements the experience of the game well.

XBN: Tell us more about the characters in *Shenmue II*.

Suzuki: Ryo is the hero. Then we have a girl called Nozomi, from the original *Shenmue*. Ryo also meets a girl called Joy, wandering in Hong Kong. [*Picks up the phone*] Someone get me a picture of Joy.

Anyway, Joy is a more modern girl. She rides a bike, and has big hooters [*Suzuki cups his breasts*]. There's also a guy called Ren, who's sort of Ryo's rival. Bit of a bad guy, actually. We also have a grandmaster martial arts instructor who you meet near the end, and she's also pretty hot [*Smiles*].

XBN: Will you be able to transfer save data from the Dreamcast version of *Shenmue* to the Xbox sequel?

Suzuki: No—in the Dreamcast version, you could transfer your data, but for Xbox we've just started players off with a lot of those extras in the game. from the start.

XBN: How do you expect players to be familiar with the story, playing from the second in the series?

Suzuki: Well one thing we're going to announce is that we'll be including a free DVD of *Shenmue: The Movie* with each copy of the game. This is a 90-minute movie describing the story of *Shenmue*, so players can watch this before playing the sequel—that is, if they're interested in learning about the story. I directed the movie myself, by the way, and we made lots of additional material for it.

XBN: What's your general impression of the Xbox hardware?

Suzuki: I think it's great hardware. It feels like a powerful weapon. At the same time, many developers will not know how to wield it. I'm an engineer at heart, so the next-generation spec of Xbox fascinated me, as all new hardware does [*Suzuki gestures around his office to the array of hi-tech gadgetry*]. We can't just look at the tech specs though. We also need to look at the market itself.

XBN: Don't you want to use all this power to make an original game for Xbox?

Suzuki: Possibly. I'd like to use the hard disk in some unique way. Ethernet is a nice feature too. No plans for any original games yet, but I'm always kicking around concepts. [*Motions to an unusual new character on the whiteboard behind him*] That's one of them. Right now I'm still doing research on what I can do with the hardware. Nothing specific at this stage.

XBN: Okay, three projects rumored to be development at AM2: *Shenmue III*?

Suzuki: Not at the moment. That depends on how well *Shenmue II* is received. I've written the series myself up to Chapter 11. [*Picks up phone again and asks for someone to bring in his original* Shenmue *manuscripts*]. See here, Chapters 1, 2, 3—and in this big book are Chapters 5-11.

XBN: That's huge. Do you think you'll ever get to make them?

Suzuki: I'd really like to…one day. Of course, I've done concept stuff and research into further sequels. I've got some of the visuals prepared all the way up to Chapter 6. But we can't commit to them yet. The good thing is, the groundwork for *Shenmue* was the hardest part, so it would be much easier to make *Shenmue III* for us now. It would probably take half the time of the last one. Have a look at this CG mural of a Chinese court I designed—that's from a *Shenmue III* location.

XBN: *Virtua Fighter 4.1*—what was all that about?

Suzuki: That was never coming out. Rumor from somewhere.

XBN: Last year at Tokyo Game Show, Kayama talked about re-releasing old Sega titles. One of those listed was *OutRun*. Are we getting a new one?

Suzuki: We might end up licensing it out to an outside developer. Of course, we'd love to do it. What you might not know is that several of these games have already been ported to next-generation hardware. But we're still trying to decide where and how to release them to the public. I can't go into details yet as we're going to make full announcements soon.

XBN: Are any of these coming to Xbox?

Suzuki: Ask Bill Gates! Seriously though, I respect the Xbox hardware. We'll see.

XBN: Okay. How long is *Shenmue II*?

Suzuki: You can probably finish it in about 40 hours. Japanese users might finish it faster, as they're more familiar with the cultural locales of the game. But there's a huge number of extras in the world itself. You can probably play it endlessly, actually. If you want to get everything, what—100, 200 hours?

XBN: *Shenmue II* features some heavy Asian influences—what are your expectations releasing this into the U.S. market?

Suzuki: Honestly, I'm apprehensive. I want people to enjoy this. It's no secret that this is a pet project of mine. I hope Microsoft handles the marketing and advertising of this game well. It'll be a challenge.

XBN: You might have read in interviews with producer [Tomonobu] Itagaki at Tecmo, that he considers *Dead or Alive 3* to be the premier fighting game on the market, and quite vocally attacks other fighting game makers as being out of date. How would you react to this?

Suzuki: [*Pauses*] Fighting games are like Chinese food. Some people like stir fry, some crispy duck. *Virtua Fighter* has exceptional depth as a series. People are still playing *Virtua Fighter 3* years later! It depends what you look for in a fighting game.

XBN: Do you think *Virtua Fighter* is a deeper series than *Dead or Alive*?

Suzuki: I haven't really played it enough to judge. Maybe *Virtua Fighter* is a deeper series. The thing is, *Dead or Alive* hasn't been around long enough to really judge its longevity and depth as a fighter in the same terms as *Virtua Fighter*.

XBN: In that sense, don't you think Itagaki is out of order to so quickly criticize those who pretty much invented the genre?

Suzuki: I don't take it seriously. He's just promoting his game. He's making it like two boxers in a ring, throwing down the gauntlet. You know, that's fine. It's a good promotional tactic. I have no problems with however he wants to do that.

XBN: To close, what do you hope to achieve with the Xbox version of with *Shenmue II*?

Suzuki: Xbox is primarily a North American console. In that sense, I want to take the Asian influences of *Shenmue II* and introduce those gamers to a new kind experience. I want them to feel relaxed, and get a calm sense of play from the game, which might be different to what they're used to from U.S.-developed games. If I can broaden their horizons in this way, I'll feel like I achieved what I set out to do.

SPIN

Essential Selections

Your Xbox is your multimedia pal. It gets tired of the guns and the explosions and the videogame shenanigans, so feed it some music and cinematic masterpieces.

Global Goon, *Vatican Nitez*

Wow...this is good. Buy-a dozen-copies-for-your-friends-but-then-keep-them-all-for-yourself-"why?-um...just-in-case" good. Filled with more cute/scary melodies than even the album's mysteriously ill-waka-waka beats know what to do with, this is what you want pumping through your headphones when you want to feel quietly indestructible. Richard D. James (Aphex Twin) has pronounced Global Goon's Johnny Hawk a musical genius, and after just a couple of tracks into *Nitez* it's easy to understand why. Buy it on wax (for the alien robot dude pressed onto the vinyl), or snatch the CD for the lovely art pictured here.

Push Button Objects, *Dirty Dozen*

Bringing the cybernetic ruckus with blunted robot beats and rugged-as-hell production, Push Button Objects' special brand of ill-ified instrumental hip-hop can be enjoyed in full-length format on this excellent disc. It's grimy space-fodder to the fullest: haunting, dirty melodies crawl atop clicky kicks and snares, with ghostly 8-bit noises and emcee samples rocking the boat from side to side. The glossy photo art inside is nice, and you'll be clicking your dual mouse buttons to this shizzle through the wee hours of the night. Equal parts minimal and bumping, *Dirty Dozen* is perfect for your next extended *Halo* session or climbing tall trees.

MF Grimm, *A Downtail of Ibeyx*

MF Grimm's first LP is a journey through Grimm's life—through the pain, sadness, optimism, and confidence that come with being a supervillain. Beats by Metal Fingers (aka MF Doom) and others, including Count Bass-D, feature loops ranging from beautiful jazz piano licks to stuttered static-ridden tones. It's his lyrics and delivery, however, that really stand out. One of the 10 bullets that riddled Grimm's body years ago remains inside him, and you know his words about pain and struggle are real. It's not all dark though; the album also features battle rhymes, sunny beats, and Doom and Grimm's patented supervillain sound.

Múm, *Please Smile My Noise Bleed*

This Icelandic EP will make you nothing if not chilly. Lush, ambient melodies swirl high above crunchy beats and stuttering basslines, yielding songs with refreshingly unpredictable emotional trajectories. With two original Múm tracks and six remixes from labelmates Styrofoam, ISA, Phonem, Christian Kleine, Arovane, and B.Fleischman, the tone of this EP is strangely undefinable; simultaneously melancholy and unpretentiously optimistic, *Please Smile* creeps up on you and then runs away before you're sure whether or not to be scared. Music to chill with furry animals and/or moths to.

Lee Perry, *Divine Madness...Definitely*

This excellent album was recorded at Lee Perry's Black Ark Studio in Kingston, Jamaica, between 1974 and 1978. If we humans someday have memory chips inside our heads which are able to call up particular albums and pipe them through our ears, this one should be a preset; the catharsis it delivers is itself worthy of attention. Each of the tracks on here is a rare gem, and regardless of its familiarity with the genre, your brain knows that it hasn't heard them before...it would remember if it had. Good music by which to p-p-p-*Power-Up!* in preparation for an interaction with a hottie of your preferred gender.

Minibosses, *Self Titled*

Before famous people such as Mixmaster Mike and Bad Religion started doing videogame soundtracks, true gamers honored blips and bloops of yesteryear. But if too much MIDI makes you feel like an android, check out the Minibosses: Based out of Arizona, the foursome has been playing covers of 8-bit era video game music since 2000. Described as everything from metal to surf to prog-rock, the album tastefully reinvents the pixelated into something less synth-y and more punk rock, including a metal *Contra*, a surf-inspired *Castlevania 2*, and an emotional rendition of *Kraid/Metroid*.

The Gospel According to Philip K. Dick

If you don't know Phillip K. Dick, you should. Best known for the source material for the films *Blade Runner* and now *Minority Report*, Dick was the science-fiction writer whose novels made us ask, "Do androids dream of electric sheep?" *The Gospel* sheds light on the bizarre life of the genius writer. The low-budget documentary includes interviews with friends, contemporaries, and fervent fans about the man, the phenomenon, and the madness. [illegible] a campy, progressive dance score. (It might also be noted that every male interviewed in the film has long flaxen hair.) Though the film starts slowly, things spark up when friends recall Dick's major epiphanies, such as his possible FBI surveillance, prophetic visions, and communication with otherworldly beings. "The Gospel" couldn't be more accurate; friends and fans alike refer to Dick as a visionary or cult leader, and his writings as religion. This documentary provides a nice segue into his continually relevant scriptures.

Battle Royale

Mix equal parts *Lord of the Flies*, *Survivor*, and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and the resulting concoction would be just the tip of the cinematic iceberg that is *Battle Royale*. This Japanese import tells an apocalyptic tale of a Japan in economic crisis; one in which young adults run rampant with delinquency being the cause they rally behind. The government hopes to change things by shipping a junior high class to an island for three days for an all-out battle to the death. Arming the children with weapons and strapping explosive collars on [illegible] teacher, and the story is shocking, appalling. and thought-provoking all at once. *Battle Royale* isn't for the squeamish, but it is an interesting examination of human nature that's well worth a look.

The Simpsons: The Complete Second Season

Crippled in his hospital bed, "Captain" Lance Murdock ("If he's not in action, he's in traction!") tells impressionable Bart Simpson that yes, he should become a stuntman. "Remember, son," Murdock says. "Bones heal, chicks dig scars, and the United States of America has the best doctor-to-daredevil ratio in the world!" Truly, this is when *The Simpsons* stepped into greatness, and Fox captures the moment wonderfully on four DVDs containing the entirety of the Best Show Ever's 22-episode second season.

[illegible] is in the shows themselves: from the introduction of wayward aliens Kang and Kodos and the fat-bodied Comic Book Guy, to Marge's Simpson's misguided war on cartoon pranksters Itchy and Scratchy, the magic in the mold cannot be dismissed. You buy now, or you pay for it later when all your smart friends laugh at you for not owning this masterwork.

UHF

Weird Al's fall from grace began after *UHF* bombed at the box office and was pulverized by the press in 1989. Perhaps what those critics (and absentee moviegoers) could never quite grasp was the thin line between comic genius and utter stupidity…and for those of us who can appreciate the significance of this line, *UHF* rides it like a hairy, sweating, bow-legged ballerina.

Al's magnum opus is rough around the edges, but its moments of genuine urination provocation are frequent enough. And the production of the disc is 100 percent Weird [illegible] million budget to make this ridiculous film. Three words: Wheel. Of. Fish.

Rollerball

Rollerball, as done by director John McTiernan and talentless actor L.L. Cool J, set humanity back at least 20 years—and that's during the opening credits. Still, McTiernan's plotless wreck did one thing (and one thing only) right: it made the original *Rollerball* look like *Citizen Kane*.

In the world of Norman Jewison's *Rollerball*, the corporations have taken over, individuality has been crushed and, worse still, we'll all be wearing leisure suits as we watch our vaguely futuristic bloodsports. James Caan (as superstar Rollerball player Jonathan E.) wants to know why he's being forced out of the game and though his quest is buried amid a series of high-[illegible] implications, shockingly violent (just avert your eyes when Moon Pie gets killed) [illegible] dream for a sweat-soaked sheet night.

Soylent Green

Soylent Green is a prophetic tale about the devastating effects of pollution and a fine argument for birth control, to boot. In a ravaged, overpopulated New York City, space is scarce and so is food. The [illegible] mainly on Soylent Reds and Yellows, crackers controlled by the mysterious Soylent Corporation. Despite the vegan-sounding name, its newest product, Soylent Green contains the most shocking ingredient of all.

Gruff, gun-toting Charlton Heston plays a cop [illegible] green crackers that everyone's so nuts about. The film depicts a desperate and [illegible] are called out when the crowds get too unruly. And, praise be! Though this future may be bleak, there are still videogames—note the scene where Leigh [illegible]

INBOX

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Last issue...

Delicious features on Sega's stunning *Panzer Dragoon Orta*, the online future of Xbox, in-depth reviews of *Hunter: The Reckoning*, *Spider-Man* and *World Series Baseball*, riveting previews of *ToeJam and Earl 3*, *Broken Sword*, and *Y: Project*, orgiastic interviews with Peter Molyneux and Tenacious D. And so much more.

Hey guys. I've been picking up your mag at the stands since its debut. I really enjoy your unbiased opinions and interviews. I like how you show us your favorite movies and CDs also, since the Xbox has other functions than a gaming machine. The third issue seems to have fixed all of the gramatical problems that plagued your last two issues... I think I only found a couple throughout my reading.

My biggest suggestion to you is that you improve the magazine's look. The content is fabulous, but cover to cover your magazine is ugly as hell. Who wants to struggle reading white letters on a light-gray background with little pictures in the corners? Check out a *PC Gamer*. They always have clever covers and colorful pages filled with big pictures. It's never a struggle to read.

My mom couldn't make out the words throughout the XPRESS section. While the FUTURE section wasn't bad, the FEATURE section got crappy again. Just a suggestion... keep up the good work.
Matt Tomeo

I've just finished reading, and for the most part enjoying *XBN* issue #3. I found the writing to be informative and humorous, the reviews objective, and the interviews interesting. However, my 34-year-old eyes eventually rebelled at the furshlugginer white text on gray background thing! For that matter, white text on any background. Please, stop. I beg you, stop. Oh, the humanity.
Martin Winter

Hello. I have read your Inbox section in your magazine. I thought it was hillarious. I think all of you people should buy the warranty when you get the Xbox. I didn't, but mine is fine. Also, I think your responses to people's questions are funny.
Addison

The gibbons are truly earning their gruel and banana halves.

Say...how does a person go about getting an opportunity to write articles for this magazine? I've been playing games since Mr. Do was running around on the Colecovision and could contribute some kick-a$$ stories...
Sergio W. Willis

Like young, svelte Elvis said, Sergio, all you need is a strong heart, and nerves of steel.

Then, pack a manila envelope full of $50 bills (unmarked and unsequential) and send it to us.

My copy of issue #3 of *Xbox Nation* has a bronze cover instead of the usual blue ones I see. Does that mean I get a prize?
Michael Lacerna

Yes.

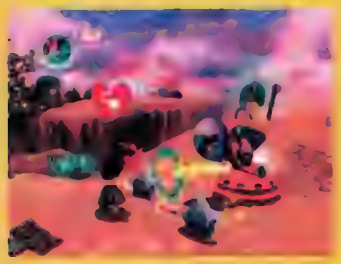
I was at Borders Books and I was trying to find magazines that would help me in making fast money, so I was skimming through magazines like *Fast Company*, *Fortune*, *Red Herring*, *Kiplinger's*, *Forbes*, and *The Economist*. Then there it was! Some clown placed the *Xbox Nation* with these fine money magazines! I tried to resist the temptation of picking up your magazine, knowing that at home my son has an Xbox. But, I had to look and then I saw all of the cool games from *Panzer Dragoon* to *Hitman 2* to *ToeJam & Earl III* and I know these games are right up my alley. If I buy all of these games for my son (so I can play them), how in the heck will I ever be rich? Can you answer that for me?
Paul Dale Roberts

Apparently, Paul Dale Roberts, you missed our feature story on using the Xbox to bludgeon unsuspecting tourists and steal their cash.

Well as much good news as there was at E3 for all of us Xbox owners (and there was plenty), one can't but help to be a little disappointed by the loss of a few major titles. *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* and *Grand Theft Auto 3* were arguably (along with *Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance*) some of the bigger third-party titles Xbox gamers craved.Then came two crushing announcements. First Rockstar and Sony announce a deal that not only will keep *Auto 3* off the Xbox, but every subsequent title in the series away as well, through 2004. This certainly was a major blow and does it mean future Rockstar titles (*Max Payne 2*) are also in jeopardy? Then it is revealed that there's a growing rift between EA and MS over online servers—which leads to EA not supporting "Xbox Live" with any of their games this year. Bye, Bye *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*. (Yeah I know they're porting *Frontline*) What does this mean for *Battlefield 1942*? My only point is Microsoft had to have known the magnitude of these games, and more importantly these companies as third-party partners and see to it that they would/will continue to support the Xbox. Come on guys wake up and get something done!
GreatDayne.

Well, it's certainly unfortunate that some of the games you mentioned won't be coming to the Xbox. That said, we find ourselves remembering the words of sage/Gum impersonator Katie Olson, who is fond of saying, "Sometimes you get the bear, and

"The content is fabulous, but cover-to-cover, **your magazine is ugly as hell.**" Matt Tomeo



How can you parlay this (see above picture) into $$$? Read *Xbox Nation*!

sometimes the bear gets you."

We expect that Microsoft is doing its level best to woo third-party developers to the Xbox. Sometimes, though, some titles get snatched by other consoles. It's just the way the game is played.

I just read *Opening the Xbox*, and it mentions that Seamus Blackley got married to Vanessa (Van) Burnham, who wrote the great book *Supercade*. She was supposed to start a cool new game magazine called *Super*, but I don't see it anywhere. Blackley also left the Xbox team to form his own company. What's going on?
Scott Whitmore

What's going on is that Van Burnham's Web site is about as useful as an ingrown toenail, we've heard nothing about *Super* since its insert in an issue of *Stuff* magazine earlier this year, and Seamus Blackley has formed Capital Entertainment Group with Kevin Bacchus—hopefully not with the intention of creating *Tresspasser: The Sequel*.

OUTBOX

Garbage in, garbage out...

"I need to get a (expletive deleted) hat. God has been (expletive deleted) on my head all week."
It's just another tricky day for Editor-in-Chief Simon Cox.

"Don't be surprised if all these bottles of Vanilla Coke are soon replaced with bottles of vanilla vodka."
Managing editor Greg Orlando stumbles upon a new way of dealing with the hell that is XBW's deadline week.

"How about vanilla rat poison?"
Young Evan Shamoon gets in a zinger.

"The kids they like the loud rock music, the illegal drugs, the fornication, and the Pac-Man. Oh, and they also like the shooting."
In Greg's day, it was all Bomb Pops and Saturday morning cartoons.

"Hurtyourself."
Art Director David Zigurey coins the rallying cry for the XBW staff.

"Why are the monsters fighting the humans? Couldn't the monsters and the humans just come to some sort of mutually agreed upon non-violent solution?"
Greg opens his mouth yet again. Does he ever shut up? Anyway, this time, he's talking to a bewildered developer showing him the Xbox shooter *Shayde: Monsters vs. Humans*.

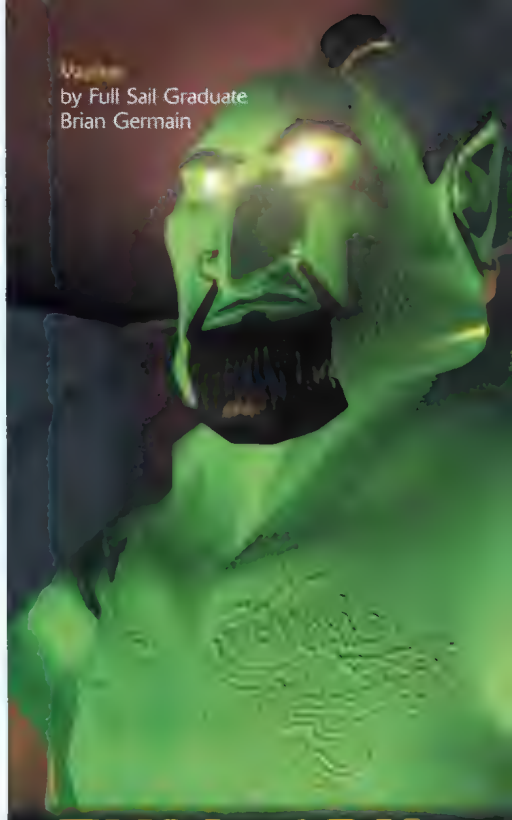
Mail of the moment

Your guess is as good as ours...

Hello!
Xbox Nation I have recently bought the Xbox I like it and controller never had any problems with it some games are not good for Xbox I like to play for long time until I am sleepy then I stop I have seen Xbox magazine nice! Some people are not getting good service for Xbox and games so they brag! I like to be Xbox fan I have not played *Halo* my first game was *Azurik* now it's *NightCaster* it's not that good it hard to pick out games for the Xbox I always worry about how much it cost for games
Video game fan!
Name Withheld

This accurately represents our sincere and heartfelt confusion

We could not agree more. Unless, of course, we knew what on God's green Earth you were talking about.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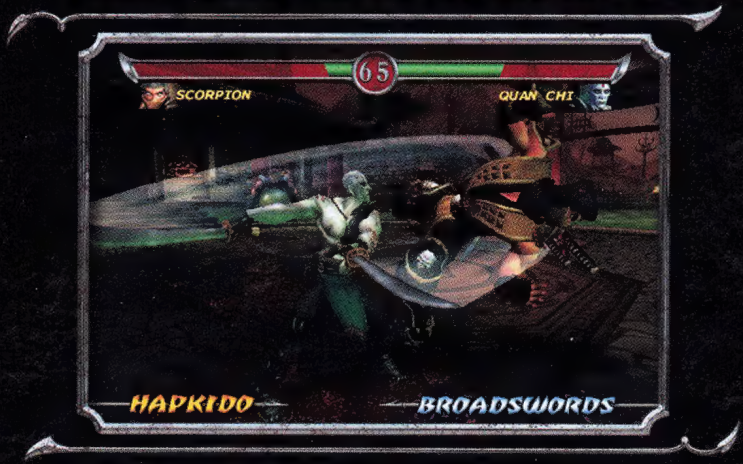

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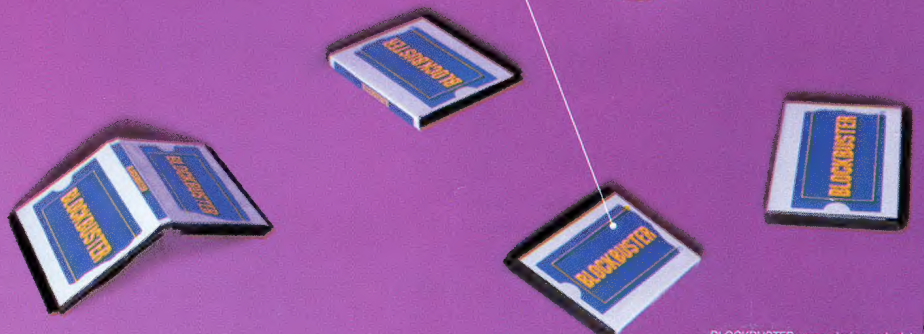

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